Contemporary Portraiture in Australia:
1990s to 2010s

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DECLARATION

I, Penelope Ann Royston, hereby acknowledge that this dissertation is my own work and all sources used have been acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices of the discipline.

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary portraiture in Australia is undergoing a revolutionary change in response to the growth of new media, digital imaging and the proliferation of selfies in the networked-digital age. While the effects of new technologies on portraiture are undeniable, this thesis argues contemporary portraiture from the 1990s to 2010s is a synthesis of both traditional modes of representation and new art forms that is expanding our understanding of what is a portrait. Some contemporary portraits have vestiges of Western historic portraiture conventions—mimesis, physiognomy and authenticity—while in others the links have become fragile and contestable. This thesis analyses how contemporary portraiture extends beyond established portraiture traditions to create alternate forms of representation in new and unexpected ways. The study shows contemporary portraiture is becoming increasingly ambiguous and fragmented in form, style, and subject matter. Particular attention is paid to how the desire for social connectedness, that is, being linked up to social media and linked in to internet sites, and the need to take selfies on hand-held devices is redefining portraiture. Furthermore, it examines how the contemporary portrait contributes to changing perceptions of Australian society, national and cultural identity, and ideas of selfhood. It also analyses how new media is disrupting conventional ways of curating and presenting portraits in the gallery setting offering unparalleled opportunities for visitor engagement by presenting portraits on and off the walls. An important distinction made in this thesis, is the significance of portraits of country that gives rise to an alternative concept of subjectivity as a visual and spiritual marker of Indigenous cultural identity. When considered in this way, Indigenous portraits of country go beyond the Western concept of individual difference that allows for a more expansive meaning of portraiture. The outcome of this research study is a body of knowledge and scholarly discourse on recent developments in contemporary portraiture and visual culture brought about by a significant gap in knowledge of the subject.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an art historical exploration of contemporary portraiture in Australia from the 1990s to 2010s. Contemporary portraiture is undergoing a revolutionary change in response to the growth of new media, digital imaging and the proliferation of selfies in the networked-digital age. While the effects of new technologies on portraiture today are undeniable, I argue contemporary portraiture is a synthesis of both traditional modes of representation and new art forms that is expanding our understanding of what is a portrait. Some contemporary portraits have vestiges of Western historic portraiture traditions—mimesis, physiognomy and authenticity—while in other portraits the links have become fragile and contestable. Nevertheless, contemporary portraiture is no longer restricted to, or defined by, well-established portrait conventions and extends beyond these traditions to create alternate forms of representation in new and unexpected ways. Whether this is by using traditional media of painting, sculpture and photography, accepted iconography or new media forms driven by new technologies.

This in-depth study of contemporary portraiture is based on extensive research of the literature and prevailing discourses from art history, sociology and visual culture; contemporary curatorial practice, and an analysis of selected Australian portrait works, and international portraits where relevant. Contextualising the works of Australian portrait artists with those of their international contemporaries provides an important frame of reference within the wider global realm of portraiture. Some of the artists discussed in this thesis are well-established in the art world, whereas other artists are emerging or less well known and valued in terms of their contribution to portraiture. Emerging is a term frequently used to describe the early stage career trajectory of a contemporary artist—the more common is around five years but usually less than ten years. Two notable emerging artists earlier this century Natasha Bieniek and Christian Thompson have had a dramatic rise to fame and recognition of their work that is reshaping contemporary portraiture.

The thesis is not a survey of contemporary portraiture but a focused examination of key themes that go beyond a general study of portraiture. The thematic demarcations provide a pertinent framework and any attempt to create a chronology of portraiture over the stated period is regarded as artificial and deemed unnecessary.

The motivation to undertake this study was brought about by a gap in knowledge of contemporary portraiture in Australia from the 1990s to 2010s. To date, there has been no substantial scholarly analysis in art historical terms of, or significant text dedicated to, the subject and this thesis sets out, in part, to fill this lacuna. There are some pertinent writings by Australian art historians and scholars that have made important forays into selected areas of contemporary portraiture and photography, as well as monographs on artists, on which my research builds. Former senior curator of the National Portrait Gallery Michael Desmond responds to the application of new technologies and explains how they are reshaping our understanding of portraiture today in his key work *Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the Digital Age*[1]; academic Helen Ennis examines photography in Australia in her texts *Photography and Australia*, and *Mirror with a Memory: Photographic Portraiture in Australia*[2]; former curator Vivien Gaston considers self-portraits in the National Gallery of Victoria collection in her work *The Naked Face: Self-portraits*[3]; and former curator of the Art Gallery of New South Wales Judy Annear argues in her text *Blank Face*[4] that there are two important antecedents of contemporary portrait photography: one that strives to capture a moment of transition and the other that can be regarded as fiction. In addition, the research for this thesis has been drawn from scholarly material from other Australian and international sources that are acknowledged in the literature review later in this introduction. The outcome of this study is a body of knowledge and findings on recent developments in contemporary

[1] Michael Desmond, *Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the Digital Age* (Canberra: National Portrait Gallery), 2010.
[2] Helen Ennis, *Photography and Australia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007); *Mirror with a Memory: Photographic Portraiture in Australia* (Canberra: National Portrait Gallery, 2000).
[3] Vivien Gaston, *The Naked Face: Self-Portraits* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2012).
[4] Judy Annear, "Blank Face," *Art and Australia*, 46:2 Summer (2008).

portraiture, its potential contribution to the genre of portraiture and the broader fields of art history, curatorship and visual culture.

The central argument of this thesis is that contemporary portraiture is becoming increasingly ambiguous and fragmented in form, style and subject matter in response to the growth of digital imaging and new media technologies. Notwithstanding, the desire to be contemporary is tempered by the traditions of Western portraiture and a profound awareness of the art of the past.

To address the central argument, the research has considered the following four research questions. First, how does the ambiguity, fragmentation and proliferation of new art forms call into question what is a portrait today? Second, how does the contemporary portrait contribute to the changing perceptions of Australian society, national and cultural identity, and selfhood? Third, how does the desire for social connectedness, that is, being linked up to social media and linked in to internet sites, and the proliferation of selfies taken on hand-held devices impact on contemporary portraiture? Fourth, how do new ways of curating and presenting portraits on and off the walls challenge the value of the formal portrait and the gallery setting in the twenty-first century?

To address these and other subsidiary research questions, I focus on two simultaneous main themes of inquiry. The first theme involves those contemporary portraits that have evidence of the historical conventions of portraiture. The second theme of inquiry focuses on those portraits that are no longer restricted to, or defined by, such traditional notions or the use of established media, and engage with digital imaging and/or new media forms.

The two main themes have theoretical and practical significance for contemporary portraiture. In order to understand this, it is necessary to examine the role and meaning of those portraits in which the orthopsychic self is visually represented, albeit in a contemporary way, and those portraits that offer alternate modes of representation that may not be concerned with revealing a likeness of the subject, and therefore call into question the conventional paradigms of mimesis, physiognomy and authenticity. I show how and why the

representation of the subject in some contemporary portraits challenge the conventions of portraiture, while in other portraits it does not. Indeed, the research and analysis reveals the understanding of mimesis and authenticity in contemporary portraiture is being contested with new meanings by digital imaging, new media and popular culture in the networked-digital age.

Like the Box Brownie camera of a past era, digital technology makes portraiture easier and more accessible to artists and ordinary people alike, whether to capture the moment on hand-held devices, construct fictive personas on computers or access images on the internet and social media sites. The selfie taken on hand-held devices makes it possible to take a self-portrait whenever, wherever, and upload it online for anyone to see. Indeed, digital photography, internet sites and social networks have become both popular and pervasive media forms that have influenced the nature of contemporary portraiture since the final decade of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, contemporary visual culture in Australia has grown from a society of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, different cultures, beliefs and customs that has shaped our identity. In this thesis, I pay particular attention to how the contemporary portrait is playing a revelatory role in conveying the changing fabric of Australian society, national and cultural identity.

Contemporary Australian Indigenous art has grown in significance internationally since the latter part of the twentieth century because of its ability to express an ancient culture in a modern way by employing traditional motifs and subject matter, and using non-traditional materials. An important distinction is made in this thesis of the significance of portraits of country that gives rise to an alternate concept of subjectivity as a visual and spiritual marker of indigenous cultural identity. I argue when considered in this way, Indigenous portraits of country go beyond the Western concept of individual difference that allows for a more expansive meaning of portraiture. The alternate concept of subjectivity represents a different way of seeing portraiture that has no equivalent in Western understanding. This is not to say that Indigenous artists do not employ mimesis or expressions of human drama and lived experience in

contemporary Indigenous portraits but the mark of personhood is less distinguishable in Indigenous culture from the spiritual and cultural connection to country. Furthermore, the flourishing of new forms of visual expression in Aboriginal art and portraiture, with that of other cultures and new media, has heralded new ways of seeing Indigenous spiritual connection to country and people's place within it.

Moreover, contemporary art and portraiture are not yet defined in art historical terms but are being influenced by new technologies and the proliferation of new art forms within the contemporaneity of the global art world. Public and private galleries are responding to visitor engagement by presenting portraits both on and off the walls. New technologies enable galleries to engage with visitors in new ways: through self-directed exploration of portraits, art historical and curatorial content on internet and social media sites anytime and anywhere or in the gallery setting using interactive media on digital touch screens and hand-held devices. Nevertheless, the application of new technologies has not displaced the fascination and reading of the face and body in painted, sculpted and photographic portraits viewed in gallery settings. The continued relevance of the formal painted portrait is evidenced by portrait commissions sourced by public cultural institutions and the proliferation of annual portrait prizes, both new and established.

Notes on key sources and gaps in literature on portraiture, art, photography and new media

To situate this thesis, I have drawn on relevant literature in the form of monographs, theoretical writings and prevailing discourse, both historical and contemporary. These include an extensive array of texts, scholarly, curatorial and archival material (ephemera comprising published artist and exhibition catalogues, articles and reviews) written on portraiture, art, photography and new media in Australia and overseas.

Arguably, portraiture occupies an important place in art historical theory and practice. Scholarly references of a more general nature have been useful sources for this study. Foremost is the work of several British art historians. Richard Brilliant's *Portraiture*[5], along with Shearer West's *Portraiture*[6] discuss the historical and traditional notions of mimetic representation, the functions and many facets of portraiture in their texts. Likewise, art historian Joanna Woodall's *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*[7] and Emeritus Professor of art history Marcia Pointon's *Portrayal and the Search for Identity*[8] posit thematic insights into issues of authenticity, likeness, identity, and the sexual and social self that underlie conventional interpretations of Western portraiture. Other important texts are Catherine Soussloff's *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern*[9] and Norbert Schneider's *The Art of the Portrait: Masterpieces of European Portrait-Painting 1420–1670*[10] which have provided additional valuable historical context on portraiture for this thesis.

The assigning of mimesis to a represented face, hands and body taken from life as an authentic physical and psychological representation of the subject in a portrait was a notable Western phenomenon from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. For a balanced consideration of these historical notions, I acknowledge the relevance of earlier writings and theories on the traditional notions of portraiture and the pseudo-science of physiognomy in portraits by nineteenth century British historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle and eighteenth century Swiss theorist Johann Casper Lavater, and the associated discourse. Carlyle regarded portraits painted from life as true representations of a person, whereas Lavater believed the shape of the head and facial features of a person were a guide to character and personality. Whether a portrait could or can capture the essence of a person is a matter of conjecture. There is more convincing evidence

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[5] Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion,1991).
[6] Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[7] Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).
[8] Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion, 2013).
[9] Catherine Soussloff, *The Subject in Art, Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
[10] Norbert Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait: Masterpieces of European Portrait-Painting 1420–1670* (Koln: Benedikt Taschen, 1994).

today that it is unreasonable to expect, or indeed is impossible, for an artist to reveal the inner truth or soul of a person through a visual representation. This has led to the consideration of the writings of notable late twentieth century American art historian Harry Berger *Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture*[11]who rejects physiognomic specificity as a flawed concept and contends the portrait is highly constructed by both the artist and sitter. He argues the only truth is the 'fictions of the pose' in fashioning the portrait. I also consider the writings of twentieth century German philosopher Erich Auerbach, notably *Mimesis: The Reproduction of Reality in Western Literature*[12] on how mimetic representation imitates life and other writings by Ernst Gombrich, Victor Stoichita, Paul Barlow and Elisabeth Findlay are explored in detail in Chapter One.

Moreover, there are many texts on certain facets of portraiture, such as those by British authors Anthony Bond and Joanna Woodall on the *Self-portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*[13] and Frances Borzello on the *The Naked Nude*[14], as well as German art historian Ernst Rebel's text *Self-portraits*[15] that provide useful reference material. They engage with familiar concepts of the ego-ideal and the metaphorical mirror image in the act of self-exploration and self-realisation in self-portraiture. In Chapter Five, I consider how the self-portrait can operate as a catalyst for subjective fantasy as masquerades, as well as a symbolic or poetic embodiment of selfhood expressed through the language of metaphors. Australian art historian Julie Ewington's exploration of the bewitching world of self-portraits by artist Del Kathryn Barton *Del Kathryn Barton*[16] is a useful reference here. Furthermore, I consider the influence of postmodern feminism on contemporary portraiture today. A significant array of historical references and discourses, however, embrace the power of the legacy of feminism and

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[11] Harry Berger, J. "Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture." *Representations*, 46 Spring (1994).
[12] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, fifth ed., trans. Willard R Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[13] Anthony Bond, and Joanna Woodall, *Self-Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2006).
[14] Frances Borzello, *The Naked Nude* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012).
[15] Ernst Rebel, *Self-Portraits* (Koln: Benedict Taschen, 2008).
[16] Julie Ewington, *Del Kathryn Barton* (Sydney: Piper Press, 2014.

feminist art since the 1970s. I draw on this history and current views proposed by academics and artists on the ways in which Australian society views representations of women in the media and visual culture. History has shown women artists have used the centrality of the body and self to communicate their messages and disrupt the stereotyping of women's roles and sexuality in society. For example, in 2015 Australian academic Jacqueline Millner and her colleagues critically reviewed historic assumptions and current practice in their study on *Art and Feminism: Twenty-First Century Perspectives*.[17] They explain how gender power relations of male subject and female object are embedded in Western society's values, knowledge and visual culture, and show how feminism exposes these social inequities in art practice foregrounded in video, performance, photography and craft media. They argue women artists continue to draw upon feminist art history and theory to drive their own innovative art practices and cultural critiques of the realities of institutional gender inequity today.

Another body of literature examines the history of Australian art from colonial times to the late twentieth century in Australia. The late Australian art historian Andrew Sayers' introductory text *Australian Art*[18] makes brief reference to contemporary art and portraiture within his historical perspective on Australian art. Australian art historian Sasha Grishin's *Australian Art: A History*[19] provides a more comprehensive account of Australian art history from ancient Indigenous rock art to contemporary art and portraiture, from which I draw useful points on the institutionalisation of contemporary art practice. In addition, Australian academic Howard Morphy's *Aboriginal Art*[20] provides a history of Indigenous art from the concept of the 'Dreaming' and its spiritual relationship to country, the Aboriginal kinship system with reference to the Yolngu clans, dialogue about colonial-settler society and contemporary developments. Australian academics Jessica Weir and Luke Taylor[21] examine Indigenous people's contemporary

[17] Millner, Jacqueline; Moore, Catriona; Cole, Georgina, "Art and Feminism: Twenty-First Century Perspectives." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 15: 2, 2015: 145-148.
[18] Andrew Sayers, *Australian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[19] Sasha Grishin, *Australian Art: A History* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2013).
[20] Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon, 2006).
[21] Jessica Weir, *Country, Native title and Ecology* (Canberra; Australian National University E Press, 2012).

thinking about their attachment to country as central to their way of life. Former Australian curator Wally Caruana's *Aboriginal Art*[22] provides a detailed account of the art of selected regions, including Arnhem Land, the Central and Western Desert regions, Northern Australia, as well as art made by Indigenous urban artists, those being Aboriginal people living outside traditional remote communities. As a key to understanding how photography became a popular and powerful means of communication for contemporary Indigenous artists, Caruana maintains urban artists presented an alternative to the negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people viewed in popular media in their quest for equality and justice in Australian society from the mid to late twentieth century. For a key to understanding portraits of country, I consider some of the portraits in the groundbreaking exhibition *Open Air: Portraits in the Landscape*[23] held at the National Portrait Gallery in 2008. Furthermore, Australian historians Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones, Blair French and Daniel Palmer[24] examine the portrait works of key Indigenous artists. Again, I draw on these and other writings by Australian academics Ian McLean, Marcia Langton, Jane Lydon and Melinda Hinkson in Chapter Two.

To comprehend the meaning of the 'contemporary' in a contemporaneous world, a context for contemporary portraiture, I examine the writings of Australian-American academic Terry Smith, including the texts *What Is Contemporary Art?* and *Contemporary Art: World Currents.*[25] He provides a view of what is meant by the term *contemporary*, as well as a summary of recent global developments in contemporary art. According to Smith, the term contemporary is more than a general descriptor of the consequential art of the present, as developments in contemporary art emerge from the contemporaneousness of lived differences across the globe with the proliferation of global subcultures, art biennials and expositions. British art critic Brandon Taylor in his book *Contemporary Art: Art*

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[22] Wally Caruana, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003).
[23] Andrew Sayers, *Open Air: Portraits in the Landscape* (Canberra: National Portrait Gallery, 2008).
[24] Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones, *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008); Blair French and Daniel Palmer, *Twelve Australia Photo-Artists* (Sydney; Piper Press, 2009).
[25] Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2011).

Since 1970[26] exposes some of the complexities of contemporary art in Europe and North America. He also argues that the institutionalisation of the art market in the 1980s realised an expansion of public museums and private galleries, the elevation of the curator, and the advent of the 'blockbuster' exhibition. These sources are relevant in developing an understanding of the context and meaning of contemporary portraiture.

In order to make sense of postmodernism and its implications for contemporary portraiture, in Chapter One I examine essays by eminent late twentieth century British and French art critics Hal Foster, Craig Owens and Jean-Francois Lyotard in Foster's edited anthology *Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture.*[27] These theorists argue that art from the 1970s onwards was no longer grounded in historicism and the universal ideals of modernism, and as a result became suffused with philosophies of postmodernism—pluralism, pastiche and simulacra. Furthermore, British author Howard Risatti's *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art*[28] provides a useful dialogue on how opposition to the separation between the formal aesthetic qualities of art practice and social experience, as espoused by American author Clement Greenberg in 1939, emerged as a central theme of postmodernism. It is worth noting here that Shearer West contends that portraiture was disparaged in much modernist critical theory because the primary aesthetic values of form and style over the secondary subject were said to be alien to the specificity of the portrait.[29] Importantly, appropriating past styles and placing them into a new context in the present provokes discussion about originality and authenticity in contemporary art practice.

In addition, the emergence of the idea of the simulacrum challenged the very notion of originality and mimesis in visual representation during the 1980s. In his writing *Simulacra and Simulations* [30] French philosopher Jean Baudrillard

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[26] Brandon Taylor, *Contemporary Art: Art Since 1970* (London: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005).
[27] Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Washington: Bay Press, 1983).
[28] Howard Risatti, *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art* (London: Prentice Hall, 1990).
[29] West, *Portraiture*, 191–203.
[30] Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations", *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster. (Oxford: Polity Press,1988).

advanced the paradox of 'hyperreality without reality', that is, when the image becomes more real than reality itself. I argue digital imaging and the ability of new technologies to create a simulacrum as an illusion of reality is further eroding the veracity of the portrait image, as hyperreality comes face to face with the networked-digital age. Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality builds on that of other influential authors of the twentieth century. In his many writings of the 1930s, German theorist Walter Benjamin exposed the notion of originality in film and photography reproduction as a myth, a fraudulent mask of the subject. Benjamin concluded that the displacement of an image from its original context in the age of mechanical (technological) reproduction would strip it of its 'aura', that being the special quality of the representation, by reducing its authenticity and aesthetic ideals which would then become politicised. Benjamin believed the aura of an art work could not be transferred to a mechanical reproduction, that is a photographic print. Baudrillard's and Benjamin's theories are important for this thesis in the discourse on the effects of illusions of reality in contemporary portraiture and popular culture today in Chapter Four.

While a multitude of monographs on contemporary artworks and photography in Australia and internationally lay an important foundation of knowledge for this thesis, literature on contemporary portrait works in Australia remains sparse. Despite this, an important source of knowledge are curatorial essays in exhibition catalogues and journals on contemporary art and portraiture published by public cultural institutions in Australia.

Furthermore, I draw on the writings of Australian curators on recent developments in curatorial practice that influence the way portraits of the past and present are displayed and communicated to audiences in gallery settings. At the same time, how people use and adapt digital imaging and new media, as contemporary media of creativity and communication, are key drivers in changing how audiences view portraiture and the fragility of verisimilitude. This last point highlights the impact of the networked-digital age in which internet and social media sites have become forums to display and view art, thereby contesting the value of the formal portrait and the museum setting today.

This thesis is especially concerned with how new media is bringing about contemporary changes in visual culture and social engagement and its subsequent impact on contemporary portraiture. In his text *The Rise of the Networked Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*[31] Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells analyses contemporary media cultures governed by a networked society and globalism. Significantly, the networked society in the digital age has become central to both the artist and the art establishment against a backdrop of visitor engagement online. Internet users are able to communicate beyond well-defined social and cultural boundaries, expanding sociability and absorbing global media cultures. Moreover, American social theorists Russell W Belk and Sherry Turkle explore the effects of computer culture on self-identity arguing that it has become suffused with new social meanings from online communications and sharing of images. Belk's notion of *The Extended Self in a Digital World*[32] was embodied in relationships between people, places and objects as a marker of social belonging. He then expanded upon his ideas by arguing the relationship between the online and offline persona is the key to self-identity in the digital age. Turkle goes beyond Belk's notion of the extended self to introduce a new perspective on people's responses to contemporary computer culture and connectivity embodied in networked devices. I draw on Turkle's groundbreaking work published over thirty-plus years that includes: *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*; *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*; *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other;* and *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*.[33] To contexualise her research, Turkle explains how people's engagement with information technology and new media has changed the way they think and see themselves, and their relationships with others in everyday life. In her 2015 work, she presents further analysis of how

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[31] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Networked Society; The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).
[32] Russell W Belk, "The Extended Self in a Digital World," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40: 3 October (2013).
[33] Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computer and the Human Spirit*, 1984; *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet,* 1995; *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, 2015 (Massachusettes: Massachusettes Institute of Technology Press); *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

virtual communication on the internet and social media is degrading the quality of human relationships through disconnection anxiety, an inability to empathise with other people's feelings, and the desire to craft more appealing personal identities online. This has implications for expressing selfhood, as digital photographs, namely the selfie taken on hand-held devices and communicated online, form a significant part of this connectivity. Engagement with the internet and social media is expected to become all the more pertinent for artists and people at all levels of society to display images of themselves and others in the twenty-first century.

Lastly, the new century offers a growing list of texts on digital photography and new media art by international authors, some of which I have drawn on for this thesis. Notably, American academics of new media arts Christiane Paul's *Digital Art*[34] and Rachel Greene's *Internet Art*[35]; as well as British author of both photography and new media Martin Lister in his texts *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* and *New Media A Critical Introduction*[36] on visual culture and new technologies. In addition, British curators of photography: Charlotte Cotton in her text *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*[37] and Liz Wells' *Photography: A Critical Introduction*[38] provide an anthology of photography; and American curator of photography Shannon Thomas Perich's text *The Changing Face of Portrait Photography: from Daguerreotype to Digital*[39] and British writer Graham Clarke in his texts *The Photograph* and *The Portrait in Photography* [40]usefully consider developments in photography that are relevant to portraiture. Moreover, there is a substantial list of writings by photographers, cultural commentators and academics on photography and new media in the twentieth century as useful general and historical references.

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[34] Christiane Paul, *Digital Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003).
[35] Rachel Green, *Internet Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).
[36] Martin Lister, *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, 2013; *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2009, (London: Routledge).
[37] Charlotte Cotton, *The Photography as Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014).
[38] Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2009, 2015).
[39] Shannon Thomas Perich, *The Changing Face of Portrait Photography: from Daguerreotype to Digital* (Washington: National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institute, 2011).
[40] Graham Clarke. *The Photograph* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1997): *The Portrait in Photography* (London: Reaktion, 1992).

Methodology and structure

For this study, I have used a methodology that has been both qualitative and comparative in its approach.

To address the central argument and research questions, I have undertaken a scholarly analysis of key sources; interviews and informal discussions with artists, curators, academics and commentators; as well as interpretations of selected portraits by Australian artists and, where appropriate international artists. In addition, I have drawn on further evidence sourced from formal presentations by Australian artists, curators and academics.

Interviews and informal discussions have been conducted with Australian artists and photographers, especially Annette Bezor, Petrina Hicks, Patricia Piccinini, Jude Rae, David Rosetzky. Nikki Toole and Anne Zahalka; senior curators, especially Naomi Cass, Blair French, Wayne Tunnicliffe; academics, notably Sasha Grishin, Howard Morphy, Daniel Palmer and Luke Taylor; and commentators from media and private galleries.

The analysis results from a sustained study of original portraits works in the collections of public and private galleries and museums, as well as digital works displayed online on the websites of Australian and overseas galleries. Online platforms in museums and galleries of the twenty-first century offer visitors, art historians and cultural commentators seamless access to portrait collections and virtual walk-throughs of gallery spaces. The public cultural institutions visited are: National Gallery of Australia, National Library of Australia, National Museum of Australia and the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra; the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria, Ian Potter Gallery and the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne; Art Gallery of South Australia; Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, and State Library of Queensland in Brisbane. Furthermore, private galleries and museums were visited in Sydney and Melbourne, as well as the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart.

Collectively, the artists' works examined show a range of approaches to contemporary portraiture from the 1990s to 2010s in subject, style and manner that include new art forms and traditional modes of representation. The portraits discussed have been chosen for their relevance to the specific themes that are addressed in the chapters of this thesis.

The thesis is structured around a cognitive framework of two simultaneous main themes of inquiry and selected sub-themes that have resulted from the extensive research. Chapter One defines the key philosophical and theoretical concepts of portraiture, as well as postmodernism, contemporary and contemporaneity, and the networked-digital age. Chapters Two to Seven individually explore a particular sub-theme of contemporary portraiture within the context of the two main themes. Thematic overlaps arise across chapters which provide greater understanding of the concepts, ideas, arguments and associated discourse in this thesis. Moreover, analysis of individual portraits against this framework has enabled me to interpret and provide original insights into the artists' vision and style as they relate to portraiture.

The seven chapters of this thesis are as follows:

Chapter One: Making Meaning of Portraiture, Postmodernism, Contemporary and Contemporaneity, and the Networked-Digital Age

In this first chapter, I present a foundation of the core ideas, concepts and theories about the historical notions of portraiture, postmodernism, contemporary and contemporaneity, and the networked-digital age that have theoretical and practical significance for contemporary portraiture. This foundation provides a necessary context for the ideas and arguments developed in the subsequent chapters.

The chapter begins with an art historical lens into the historical, philosophical and theoretical conventions of Western portraiture—mimesis, physiognomy and authenticity—which is contextualised within a hierarchy of theories and discourses. In order to understand contemporary portraiture in this thesis, it is crucial to elucidate the underlying reasoning behind the conventions of

portraiture. Why mimesis has remained an underlying construct of portraiture needs definition and some explanation; as does physiognomy and authenticity. Thus, I examine the writings and arguments put forth by notable international and Australian authors and academics on the historical notions of portraiture. In addition, I refer to important works by of some of the significant portrait artists of their era: namely, Jan van Eyck, Piero della Francesca, Holbein the Younger and Albrecht Durer to illustrate the reasoning behind what became established conventions. How and why contemporary portraiture is no longer restricted to, or defined by, these conventions and extends beyond them to create alternative forms of representation in new and unexpected ways, is central to this thesis.

From this historical lens, I provide a definition of what is a portrait that is inclusive of different cultural expressions, traditions, identities and place. I also explain what is meant by the terms contemporary and contemporaneity in the contemporaneous world of art practice.

Furthermore, I contend contemporary art and portraiture cannot be understood without comprehending the effects of postmodernism and its place in art historical theory and criticism. The disenchantment from the formalist ideals of modernism inspired a pluralist cultural ethos which resulted in greater freedoms of expression and fragmentation of art practice. By way of example, artists Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, Sherrie Levine and Jeff Koons challenged conventional thinking about authenticity and authorship during different times of the twentieth century by appropriating commonplace objects and images to create an original work. In doing so, their artworks became appreciated by the art world as legitimate works of art by subverting the power of the original image. In addition, I analyse and explain what is meant by the terms simulacrum and hyperreality, the implications of which impact upon the understanding of portraits as illusions of reality that is discussed in Chapter Four.

Finally, making meaning of the growth and influence of new media on contemporary portraiture and visual culture in the networked-digital age is an essential narrative for this thesis. Here I begin to explain how the focus on digital imaging and social connectedness is reshaping our understanding of

portraiture and verisimilitude which is expanded upon in Chapter Six. Importantly, I provide an explanation of what is meant by new media, new technologies and digital imaging for this thesis.

Chapter Two: Portraits of the Nation, Culture and Place

The portrait remains compelling in its vision to portray a nation, its people and place, whether historical or contemporary, as an expression of identity. In this chapter, I explore how contemporary portraits are re-imaging Australia's nationhood, from what was once narrowly understood as British colonial to a nation of many cultures, ethnicity, religious beliefs and social customs. I show how the concept of national identity, and what it means to be an Australian, is different now from that previously understood in the past by many Australians. That said, Indigenous Australians spiritual and cultural identity is expressed in the land as they have done for millennia.

First, I explore the changing perceptions of Australian nationality. I focus on how Australian photographer Anne Zahalka appropriates historical images and those that are culturally familiar in the present, and reworks them into a commentary on multiculturalism and the changing demographics of Australian society. Zahalka's portraits highlight that there is no single Australian national identity but rather a complex narrative of different cultures and ethnicities that continuously changes with the influx of new migrants and settlers.

It would not be unreasonable to expect that contemporary artists who are conscious of their cross-cultural heritage explore their identity in their artwork. Second, I consider how Chinese-Australian artist Ah Xian and Guan Wei seek to reclaim their past by drawing on and experimenting with ancient methods and iconography, as well as modern mediums and symbolism to overcome feelings of emotional and cultural displacement in the present. Ah Xian's sculptural and figurative forms with their intricate Chinese iconography are an expression of his cultural heritage, whereas Guan Wei's paintings with their particular blend of surrealism have a distinct Australian sensibility interwoven with Chinese symbolism that offers a unique perspective on Australian culture.

The emergence of a group of talented contemporary Indigenous artists and photographers has led to more realistic portrayals of Indigenous culture, people and lived experience than the passive objects of ethnographic study that were characteristic of past eras. That is not to say that photographers like Mervyn Bishop in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Sydney Boomalli Artists' Cooperative in the 1980s, did not use the medium effectively as a means of story-telling and political commentary. I examine the photographic portraits of Australian Indigenous artists Fiona Foley, Destiny Deacon, Darren Siwes and Ricky Maynard who explore themes of dispossession and racial inequality in the treatment of Aboriginal people. Using realism and satire, these artists seek to reveal and disrupt prevailing stereotypes about Indigenous people and culture.

In the last part of this chapter, I examine Indigenous portraits of country. I show how the significance of the land as a visual and spiritual marker of Indigenous cultural identity can be regarded as contemporary portraiture.

Chapter Three: Portraits of Society and Social Masks

In this chapter, I propose that a social portrait can provide an insight into a person's socialised self that acts as a veneer of the personal self which becomes a mask. Social masks are formed around social ideals, truths and untruths. Thus, to be fully engaged in a social milieu can require acting out roles in society that capture the attention of others or conveys status. Albeit, the fashioning of the self in social roles in portraiture is no less evident today than in history.

The idea that status and portraiture are inextricably bound is nowhere more evident than in the commissioned portraits by cultural institutions that aim to record a renowned person's contribution to society, whether by their achievements or social standing. As a key to understanding how contemporary artists reframe fame, I explore the commissioned painted portraits by Australians Jude Rae, Howard Arkley, Matthys Gerber and Guy Maestri. It is at this point that I examine the theory of *faciality* by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. They argue the physiognomy of the face is a powerful

signifier of cultural and social identity which I contend this has implications for contemporary portraiture.

Moreover, photography plays a crucial role in imaging social identity. At this point, I draw on the observation made by former curator Judy Annear that there is an inherent tension in the way photographers capture 'unguarded moments' that may appear real to the viewer but are a prearranged reality or a fiction. This tension remains at the heart of photographic portraiture today. Contemporary photo-artists may consciously stage a portrait by contriving psychological tensions and emotional states in the imagery to a greater or lesser degree, as shown in the celebrity portraits by Australian Polly Borland and American Martin Schoeller. Alternatively, they may strive to capture a moment in the lives of ordinary people, as seen in the photographs by Australians Nikki Toole and Ingvar Kenne.

Chapter Four: Portraits as Illusions of Reality

The focus of this chapter is how contemporary portrait artists create illusions of reality in staged fictions and hyperreal forms. I examine how they defy the conventions of portraiture by challenging the very idea of mimesis and authenticity. In line with this, I consider the paradox of hyperreality where the image becomes the reality, not reality itself, as put forward by Jean Baudrillard. Hyperreality, with its heightened sense of realism and underlying falsehoods, can create visual and conceptual uncertainty. Notwithstanding that journeys into the hyperreal are now commonplace in art and portraiture, digital imaging offers artists alternate means of expression beyond that of Baudrillard's dehumanised hyperreal society of the twentieth century. As a key to understanding hyperreality in contemporary portraiture, I explore the work by Australian photo-artist Petrina Hicks with her falsehoods of social ideals of beauty and perfection and those of German artist Loretta Lux with her dream-like timeless portrayals of children.

Furthermore, Australian artists Tracey Moffatt, Christian Bumbarra Thompson and Jude Rae create staged fictions to form new meanings to what is known or

understood. Moffatt and Thompson assume fantastical personas using their own image to comment on personal experiences and social-political realities across different media. Zahalka and Rae draw on the aesthetics of the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century through their placement of people and objects in a state of mindfullness in painted interior spaces to create contemporary illusions of truth. Lastly, I consider the plasticity of the human form in the amorphous hybrid creations by Australian artist Patricia Piccinini that offer the audience a window into an exotic world of future possibilities.

Chapter Five: Portraits of the Self as Metaphors and Masquerades

The self-portrait features prominently in contemporary portraiture in Australia and beyond. For an artist, the self-portrait can be a catalyst for subjective fantasy or an honest appraisal as a defining expression of selfhood. An artist may desire to create a likeness or render a fictional image as an ideal presence of the physical, emotional and spiritual self. Furthermore, an artist may be motivated to create an image worthy of their social status and professional standing, whether real or perceived. Self-exploration and self-realisation highlight the complex relationship between how artists see themselves, others may see them, and they represent themselves in their portraits.

In this chapter, I examine how contemporary self-portraits as an expression of personal identity offer the artist the opportunity to move beyond likeness to create an ideal or fictional representation of selfhood, through metaphor and masquerade. In this context, a metaphor is seen as an idea of a person that suggests semblance or something of the artist's self or their lived experience. A metaphor has symbolic or poetic meaning in which revelations of the self are expressed as a narrative or embodiment of the ego-ideal. A masquerade is viewed as a veiled expression of the self in which fantasy and reality can become curiously interchangeable. Masquerades, like metaphors, are inseparable from the artists who create them. Therefore, I examine those self-portraits where mimesis is a secondary feature of personal identity.

First, I examine the self-portrait as a metaphor. I explore how Australian artists Adrienne Doig and Tim Storrier reveal the self in a light-hearted way that challenge conventional ideas of portraiture. Doig's quirky self-portraits have the allure of a private diary in which the artist offers the viewer a glimpse into her private idealised world, whereas Storrier abandons convention with his faceless portraits to provide a more romantic vision of the self.

Second, I examine how three Australian women artists create painted masquerades and dreamscapes to explore notions of female identity using themselves as a model. In this regard, I explore the allegories of motherhood and female sexuality expressed by Del Kathryn Barton in her dreamlike narratives. Furthermore, I consider how Annette Bezor explores historical notions of female beauty and the objectification of women as decorative sexual objects. Likewise, Wendy Sharpe creates provocative and candid sexual expressions of herself in her pictorial autobiographical narratives. I look to history to explain how these women artists consciously renegotiate the presence of the naked female body from object to subject in their self-portraits revealing a feminist sensibility in their desire for gender equality. I argue the self-portrait remains an important medium of self-representation for women artists today who seek to explore the politics of female sexuality through the symbolic power of the female form.

Chapter Six: Selfies and Social Connectedness

There is no denying the communicative power of the networked-digital age. At the same time, greater connectivity has brought about a change in visual culture and with it contemporary portraiture. How artists and ordinary people use and adapt new technologies as modern media of creativity and communication is changing the way people view portraiture.

In this chapter, I build on the presence of the self in contemporary portraiture by examining the impact of social networking. I argue the desire for social connectedness, that is, being linked up to social media and linked in to internet sites and the need to take selfies on hand-held devices in the networked-digital age, is redefining contemporary portraiture. Here I refer to the work of Castells

on the networked society that responded to the development of new media technologies, diversification of media messages and global capitalism; as well as the writings of Belk and Turkle on the effects of computer culture and connectivity on self-identity and sociability.

Although the selfie has become a marker of social and personal identity in the twenty-first century, I consider how the painted portrait in miniature by Australian artist Natasha Bieniek is a contemporary visual metaphor for the selfie. The miniature portrait parallels the way people view images of the self and others on hand-held devices in a contemporary context. Its diminutive size creates an intimate experience with the viewer, much like how people viewed miniature painted portraits as keepsakes of past eras, and how the selfie does so today. I argue there is a correlation between the historical keepsake and the need to connect and share images of oneself with others on hand-held devices and social media sites today.

New media also offers the user the seductive and uncanny capacity of an alternative reality. This can be seen in the cyber world of virtual reality in which the immateriality of the fantasy identity or avatar is comprehended as an alternate self, not a real self but a simulation. I consider the fantasy identities by Italian artists Eva and Franco Mattes.

Chapter Seven: Presenting Portraits On and Off the Walls

The final chapter examines the impact of the professionalisation of those people working in the art world, and the institutionalisation of the art establishment as gate keepers and cultural commentators from the late twentieth century; art prizes; and visitor engagement in the networked-digital age. I consider how modern approaches are reshaping the way museums and galleries are collecting, curating and presenting portraits on and off the walls.

First, I begin with an historical context of the collection and display practices of Western portraiture. National cultural institutions in Australia have been oriented to the past, modelled on British ideals and imagined as places of history and memory but are now seen in a broader context of national identity.

Importantly, the establishment of the National Portrait Gallery in 1999, a national cultural institution dedicated to portraiture, is unprecedented in Australia's cultural history. The appeal of the Gallery lies in its illustrated biographies of significant people from history and individuals at the forefront of contemporary life from its collection, alongside images of ordinary people in temporary displays that capture the imagination of the art-going public.

I follow with an examination of the institutionalised conditioning of contemporary art practice by the prevailing art establishment oligarchy in which some artists are elevated to national and international stardom while other artists are not. This discourse leads to an exploration of the popularity and merits of prizes. First, I consider the influence of the prize that has most shaped Australian portraiture and acted as a barometer of both public opinion and changes in art styles over time—the Archibald Prize. In doing so, I contrast the portrait works of one of Australia's finest portrait artist and Archibald Prize winner William Dobell with the contemporary portraits of Archibald winning Australian artists Adam Cullen, Ben Quilty and Mitch Cairns. Second, I examine the National Photographic Portrait Prize and consider how this and other recent portrait prizes influence our understanding of what is a portrait.

Lastly, I consider the global gallery, how public and private galleries are responding to the global art world and the demands of the networked-digital age which is disrupting conventional ways of curating and presenting portraits by offering unparalleled opportunities for self-directed exploration of collections and exhibitions online and onsite. The gallery of today is a new kind of place that engages audiences anytime and anywhere and embraces transcultural contemporary art and portraiture from around the world. I examine how the Museum of Old and New Art is defying gallery traditions with its eclectic mix of controversial exhibits and unconventional museum space and consider how the Museum of Contemporary Art is responding to the demands of the digital age to improve visitor experiences.

CHAPTER ONE: MAKING MEANING OF PORTRAITURE, CONTEMPORANEITY, POST-MODERNISM, AND THE NETWORKED-DIGITAL AGE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundation of the conventions of portraiture and explain the key concepts of contemporaneity, postmodernism and the networked-digital age because of their theoretical and practical significance for contemporary portraiture.

The chapter is divided into four parts.

The first part provides a context for the historical, philosophical and theoretical conventions of Western portraiture. I define mimesis and explain why it has remained an underlying construct of portraiture. I also consider how physiognomy and authenticity have shaped an ideology of truth of the artist vision. Truisms have occurred despite conjecture and discernment about physiognomic specificity from which judgements of character and inner being were formed based on preconceptions and pseudo-science, and not rigorous scientific method. Furthermore, historical worth and faithful rendering of the sitter at the time a portrait was painted has governed the authenticity of the portrait. Mindful of this historical context, I then define what is a portrait which allows for a more inclusive understanding of culture, tradition, identity and place to that of Western individual difference. Importantly for this thesis, I explain how Australian Indigenous cultural traditions do not have a Western canonised concept of art and portraiture but have meaning beyond that of individual sensibility to country with its cultural understanding of the past in the present.

The second part examines what is meant by the terms *contemporary* and *contemporaneity* in the contemporaneous world of art practice. The third part explores the postmodern influences of pluralism, pastiche and simulacra. In the final part, I specify what is meant by *new media* and contextualise how digital technologies and social connectedness is redefining portraiture today.

An art historical context of portraiture

In order to understand contemporary portraiture within the context of the two main themes of this thesis, it is essential to comprehend the historical, philosophical and theoretical conventions of Western portraiture—mimesis, physiognomy and authenticity. Although no longer restricted to, or defined by, these conventions, contemporary portraiture has remnants of these traditions.

The allure of portraiture has existed since antiquity. Early portraiture focused on memorialising and commemorating a person, both in physical and spiritual forms, in tombs, temples and reliefs. At its heart portraiture made the absent person eternally present to the viewer. The desire to display and commemorate one's ancestors in figurative 'god-like' sculptures, paintings and coins reasserted claims to power and hegemony. Hence, portraiture became the dominant form of representation aligned with death and status. The marble bust stretches back to the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Images of the great and good were displayed in civic squares, promenades and significant buildings which continues today. During the medieval era, Catholic and Byzantine churches became sites for portrayals of the ruling classes in the form of illuminated manuscripts, effigies and donor portraits. The medieval portrait fulfilled an important function as a symbolic form of the power, status and divinity of clerics and the nobility who glorified their place in society. Indeed, a faithful likeness of a person in a portrait was less important than an expression of the exemplary status of those who merited emulation. This became an important distinction between Western portraiture during medieval times and that of the Renaissance period from the fifteen to seventeenth centuries which depicted greater naturalism and heightened realism of the subject in portraits. Norbert Schneider explains:

> Portraits now assumed an important role in helping to identify individuals. Inevitibly [*sic* Inevitably], this altered the dominant aesthetic, intensifying naturalistic demands for a faithful pictorial imitation of reality. Verifiable resemblance therefore became an essential criterion of portrait-painting during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.[41]

What is important to understand here is notions of individuality and mimesis that captured something of the physical appearance of the subject began to replace historical ideals around religious and social standing. Nobility, clergy, merchants, scholars, and increasingly artists desired to portray themselves as individuals within their spheres of influence and status by paying particular attention to their public image and personal appearance. Likewise, family portraits enabled people to express their individuality within a family unit and, more broadly, their role in society. Physiognomic likeness that dealt with the facial peculiarities became a popular method to determine the character or personality of a person in the eighteenth century. Portraits illuminated the subject revealing likeness and suggesting truth and authenticity with unmediated realism to document a distinctive identity in nineteenth century portraiture. Thus, portraiture became historically tied to mimesis, physiognomy and authenticity.

Mimesis

For the purpose of this thesis, I examine mimesis as the first of three historical notions of portraiture.

The Macquarie Concise Dictionary defines mimesis and mimetic as 'rhetoric imitation; mimicry'.[42] Such a simple definition belies the complexities of mimesis as a concept. The idea of mimesis harks back to ancient times with the relationship between the cerebral and corporeal. For Plato mimesis was a mere imitation of nature being the material person, whereas for Aristotle mimesis represented both the metaphysical and emotional presence of a person which

[41] Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait,* 14–15.
[42] Macquarie Concise Dictionary, fifth edition, 2009, 793.

took account of the inherent qualities or character. Alberti agreed with Aristotle that illusionistic portraiture involved the sitter's identity which was inseparable from the sense of presence achieved through mimesis.[43] Joanna Woodall explains a portrait is primarily a likeness which is seen to refer to the identity of the person depicted, however, likeness is unable to represent the inner identity of the sitter in the way claimed by Aristotle and Alberti. These two fundamental and different ideological positions within a dualist paradigm of realism and the embodied self has remained over millennia and continues today.

Mimesis in the visual arts is broadly understood as resemblance, the specificity of likeness of a subject, whether a faithful representation or an idealised semblance. Anne Gray contends " ... it may be a likeness to visual appearance of face or body, or an evocation of the physical presence of an individual; it may be a depiction of character or personality, or the mood of a person, or their spirit or soul—or some or all of these".[44] This view suggests the inner states or soul of a person can be represented through facial features, expression, body posture and gestures, as with Aristotle's and Alberti's view of mimesis. While an art work may resemble or imitate likeness, evoke identity, signify status or position of a person with the use of gesture, symbol, dress, setting and so forth, the idea that a portrait can depict the personality or evoke the spirit or inner soul of a person is supposition. Any reading of character or personality in a portrait by the artist and viewer is highly subjective but this does not mean that they cannot make connections in the imagination.

Richard Brilliant states "Whatever the mimetic quality of a portrait, the work remains a representation of the subject whose value as an approximation is less determined by its descriptive character than by the coincidence of the perceptions shared by the portrait artist and the viewer".[45] It is clear from his remarks that resemblance depends on the perceptions of the subject portrayed

[43] Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, 8–9.
[44] Anne Gray, *Face: Australian Portraits* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2010), 16.
[45] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 26.

by both the artist and viewer, that is understood or recalled from past perceptions, hence, imitation. He further explains:

> Because portraits require some discernible connection between the visible image and the person portrayed in order to legitimize the analogy, some degree of resemblance is normally posited, however, imagined. That purported resemblance, a restriction on the image's freedom of reference, has brought about the use of the term "likeness" as a synonym for "portrait".[46]

Thus, the notion of mimesis rests on verisimilitude that evokes something of the semblance or knowledge of the subject in the mind of the artist and viewer.

One of the better known modern studies of mimesis is by German philosopher Erich Auerbach who understood it as a form of literary representation, not the visual arts. Even so, it has some relevance here. His renowned work *Mimesis: The Reproduction of Reality in Western Literature*, written in the 1940s during his exile in Turkey, is a history of literary representation from ancient to modern times. He uses the terms—mimesis, realism and illusionistic realism interchangeably to describe a figure of language in which fictive reality or figural representation imitates life in literary history. Realism was regarded as a more concrete imitation, whereas illusionistic realism was a study of perspective. He does not define mimesis but encourages the reader to acquire its meaning from the context given in his textual examples and wider narrative. In his tome, he remarks that modern realism resulted from the gradual breakdown of the classical rules of distinct literary styles—low style of everyday practical reality that is not comic or idyllic, and sublime tragic style in the representation of the nobility or godly—in early nineteenth century Europe. He remarks, "[It] opened the way for modern realism, which has ever since developed in increasingly rich forms, in keeping with the constantly changing and expanding reality of modern life".[47] Even so, he believed such an emancipation could not possibly have been the first of its kind, and says in the Middle Ages and Renaissance "it had been

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[46] Ibid, Brilliant, 25.
[47] Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 554.

possible in literature as well as in the visual arts to represent the most everyday phenomenon of reality in a serious and significant context".[48] Therefore, mimesis or imitation of life has been an aesthetic phenomenon since ancient times, although its figural representation has been expressed differently through the ages according to its own suppositions and cultures. Woodall's account of history of portraiture and mimesis accords with such a narrative.

A corresponding idea of the literary and artistic doctrines of mimesis to imitate nature is the mimetic experience of expressing emotion, perception and imagination in the performing arts. The actor like the artist expresses something of the subject in the mind of the viewer by way of gesture and facial expression. In other words, mimetic expression of the theatre resembles what is experienced in life with that of the artificial passions of the actor and perceptions of the spectator by celebrating its imitative reality. This form of mimetic reality is embedded in the representative likeness of the subject in portraiture.

In addition, Barbara Maria Stafford examines mental perception of the visual appearance of things from the perspective of the cognitive sciences. Her foray into the study of mimesis in the visual arts and sciences also began in the eighteenth century with the discussion of curiosity cabinets and collages. She argues brain activity can change peoples' perspectives through emotion, mental imagery and subjective bias. In her text on visual analogy, she argues for analogical seeing in the visual arts, the perception of 'similarity in difference' or put more simply the perception of something as like what it is not. She states:

> The mimetic tradition in the West—stepped in the classical unities, on which the canons for "correct" similitude and accurate portraiture are based—is predicated on the belief that, at any given time, only one surface of an object "faces" the light. Further, this plane must unambiguously reveal its typical features by casting all that is contradictory, ephemeral, or peculiar to the moment—and therefore unlike true being—into the shade.[49]

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[48] Ibid, Auerbach, 555.
[49] Barbara Maria Stafford, "Peculiar Marks: Lavater and the Countenance of Blemished Thought," *Art Journal* 46:3 *Portraits: The Limitations of Likeness* (Autumn 1987), 185.

This view of mimesis could be regarded as an 'ideal' representation, a semblance to the subject in a way that does not reveal the peculiarities of the person. In doing so, fixing a 'positive' verisimilitude of the subject in the mind of the viewer could be viewed as akin to Auerbach's notion of illusionistic realism. She maintains people make connections between disparate elements or thoughts to synthesise meaning and find similarity or likeness of the subject over difference.[50] I suggest there is nothing new in this point of view.

Moreover, judgements about mimesis were also socially and culturally determined influenced by the prevailing artistic styles and medium of the time. West remarks from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries:

> Portraits were expected to provide both likeness and some kind of revelation of the sitter's character, status, or position, although how they did so could vary greatly. Although such expectations were not abandoned, some fundamental changes in the conception and appearance of portraiture can be seen in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[51]

Indeed, the advent of modernism saw a rejection of the representational traditions of portraiture through stylistic experimentation and formalist theory that put subject matter second to aesthetics qualities (discussed later in this chapter). Postmodernism followed in the latter part of the twentieth century and with it a plurality of stylistic inventiveness that resulted in a multiplicity of art forms. Portraiture today both engages mimetic representation in conventional portraits and contests it with new ways of representing the subject resulting in greater ambiguity and fragmentation.

By way of example of mimesis in portraiture, I look to key portraits of the Early Modern period[52]. Early fifteenth century portraits of notable people by Flemish artist Jan van Eyck were a triumph of symbolic representation and

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[50] Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 58–63, 211–212.
[51] West, *Portraiture*,187.
[52] The Early Modern period of history began after the post–classical era c1500, demarcated by the Renaissance, and ended in 1790 following the French Revolution (1789).

verisimilitude. One such example is *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) (figure 1), a famous portrait of a marriage contract that conveys hidden meanings of fidelity and fertility. In a striking tableau of richly coloured robes, surroundings and objects, van Eyck represents the mood and ritual of the moment and that of the subjects. Van Eyck artfully emphasised both veritable likeness and the marriage bond in the faces and hands (he takes hers and she extends hers to him) of his subjects. Giovanni Arnolfini slightly turns to one side, with his other hand raised in blessing as he faces towards the viewer but averts his gaze, whereas Giovanna Cenami meekly lowers her eyes as she holds her garments bunched up in front of her as a symbol of her fertility, rather than actual pregnancy. The convex mirror on the back wall, inter alia, signifies the purity of the bride, while the apples are a warning against sinful behavior, possibly that of the groom. Shearer West refers to Erwin Panofsky's authoritative analysis of this work in 1934, in which he argues van Eyck's signature above the mirror serves as witness to the private marriage ceremony by documenting his presence.[53] The figure in red reflected in the mirror affirms it is indeed that of the artist.

A modern construct of van Eyck's painting by photographer Anne Zahalka *Marriage of Convenience (Graham Budgett and Jane Mulfinger/artists)* (1987) (figure 2) loosely resembles the original work of an arranged marriage. Dressed in clothing suited to a northern European winter, the man and woman stand apart and face the camera, he holds an umbrella that reflects his British heritage and she, an American, places her hand on the bed to draw the viewer's eye to the rolled marriage certificate, without emotion they represent foreigners who seek a marriage of convenience to remain in Germany.[54] The domestic scene references the earlier art historical period but is juxtaposed with modern objects. Zahalka explains, the little Rodin sculpture of *The Thinker* is the idea of the artist practice as thoughtful and measured and the keys are a pseudonym for a key to interpretation of the image. Corresponding to the van Eyck painting, her reflection is seen in the round mirror on the wall, and above it states the year of

[53] Ibid, West, 57.
[54] Daniel Palmer, 'The Art of Self Display: on Anne Zahalka's Portraiture', in *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987–2007* (Melbourne: Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2007), 4.

the marriage *1987* and the German word *Vernunftehe* which means 'marriage of convenience'. A silver ball in a plate placed on a table in the foreground also reflects the photographer taking the image.[55] The photograph is part of her series *Resemblance* (1987) in which Zahalka bases her images on the interiors of Dutch genre paintings but with new meanings in the present as contemporary portraits. Her photographs attest to the continued influence of European artistic traditions and the notion of mimesis in portraiture.

Figure 1: Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait (The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini),* 1434
Figure 2: Anne Zahalka, *Marriage of Convenience (Graham Budgett and Jane Mulfinger/artists),* 1987

Moreover, the profile view reminiscent of medals and portrait panels of Classical antiquity was embraced in Italy in the early Renaissance to express individual difference, wealth and social standing. The double portrait of *Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino and Battista Sforza* (1472–1474) (figure 3) by Italian artist Piero della Francesca is an example of how naturalism and mimesis expressed both individuality and status in Renaissance society.

Unlike van Eyck's portrait, this double profile portrait of the Duke of Urbino and his wife Battista Sforza does not record a specific event in the couple's life but

[55] Interview with artist, Appendix Eleven, 384.

records their majesty and wealth. As Martin Warnke remarks in his critique of the Della Francesca's double portrait that unmistakable individuality and with it physiognomic peculiarities (such as the Duke's hooked nose) in a portrait that began with the Renaissance. The construction of individuality can take many forms no less facial features, social status or dress to achieve an ideal image. "The effort to create a likeness, or individuality, in a portrait may not reflect a mental disposition but, rather, the deliberate and therefore also verifiable demand for the painted rendering of an individual's face".[56] In this case, a criterion for the legitimacy of personal power.

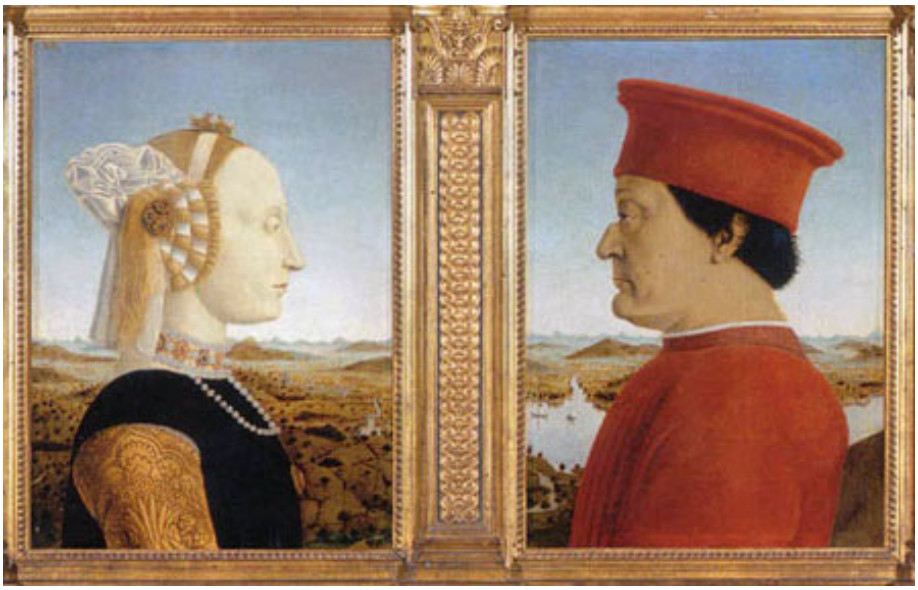

Figure 3: Piero della Francesca, *Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino and Battista Sforza*, 1472–1474

Battista Sforza died in 1472, two years before the portrait was completed. The double portrait shows the couple's eternal relationship in memorial, there is no engagement between the sitters nor any directed to the viewer. The portrait is characterised by serene humanism that reflects a physical likeness of the subjects but their expressions are stern and emotionless as they face each other in bust profile. The Duke of Urbino is featured in a left profile, as his right eye and the bridge of his nose were removed in battle in early life, and he is dressed

[56] Martin Warnke, 'Individuality as argument: Piero della Francesca's portrait of the Duke of Urbino', eds Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson, *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance* (London: British Museum, 1998), 83.

in red Cardinal robes, whereas Battista Sforza is shown in right profile dressed in pearls and fine clothes of black and gold. His complexion is tanned and hers pale which perhaps represents an ethereal presence given her death two years earlier. The subjects themselves are placed far forward in the picture plane, with a panoramic view of the landscape behind them which extends far to the distant mountains implying their expansive territories and exaggerated power and wealth. Importantly, the back of the paintings depicts an allegory of triumph and glory: Federigo symbolises the cardinal virtues of justice, wisdom, valour and moderation, while Battista characterises the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.[57]

Figure 4: Frank Hodgkinson, *Jill Wran and Neville Wran, as the Duke and Duchess of Sydney (with Apologies to Piero della Francesca),* 1983

To further understand how mimesis and individual sensibility remain a hallmark of Western portraiture, I turn to a contemporary parody of della Francesca's painting that of the portrait of Neville Wran and Jill Hickson (formerly Wran) as the Duke and Duchess of Sydney. Here artist Frank Hodgkinson records a physical likeness of the couple and more importantly, refers to the vainglorious wealth, status and political influence that the former Premier (1976–1986) and his then wife Jill had over Sydney at the time (figure 4). The double portrait

[57] Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait*, 48–51.

echoes the regal, emotionless portrayal of the Duke of Urbino and his wife in profile, with the Premier dressed in his legal barrister black-blue robes and Jill Wran in her bejewelled blue gown with pendant. Similar to the Renaissance work, the Duke and Duchess of Sydney feature large in the foreground of the painting with the expansive Sydney harbour foreshores unfolding behind them.

In 1994, Lewis Miller was commissioned by Malcolm Turnbull (now the Prime Minister of Australia) to paint a double profile portrait of him and his wife Lucy Turnbull also in the style of della Francesca's famous diptych, with the land around their New South Wales Scone property seen in the background. Like the Urbinos and Wrans before them, the portrait of the Turnbulls documents the significance of their relationship, social influence and wealth.[58]

During the Renaissance period, collections of exemplary portraits became increasingly amassed by the ruling classes and social elite to elevate individual standing. Portraits became powerful substitutes for the nobility to convey their sovereign power, reverence to God and marriageability through idealised portrayals of semblance over physiognomic likeness. Joanna Woodall comments:

> Because of these crucial functions, portraiture had to be theorized as unmediated realism. Yet although explicit invention or idealization was problematic, the *raison d'etre* of these images was actually to represent sitters as worthy of life, honour, respect and authority. It was not just that the real was confused with the ideal, but divine virtue was the ultimate, permanent reality.[59]

The fashioning of women in vicarious images of erotic desire and feminine virtue was common. The equivocal nature of morality at the time a woman was required to not only be a devoted mistress but also chaste. Imagery in portraits could illustrate otherwise. The most overt display of false virtue of this time was the *Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth 1* (c1600–1603). The portrait was also

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[58] Annabel Crabb, *Rise of the Ruddbot: Observations from the Gallery* (Melbourne: Black Inc Books, 2010), 185.
[59] Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, 3.

considered a powerful political allegory with imagery of the eyes and ears of the Queen embedded into the fabric, and religious expression of devotion.[60]

Thus, the tradition of mimesis in Western portraiture assumes a semblance of the subject in a portrait, no matter how illusory or faithful the representation.

Physiognomy

Debates on the specificity of mimesis in visual representation also centred on notions of physiognomy, the second in the hierarchy of historical notions of portraiture.

The idea that character could be interpreted through physical appearance or more precisely in the anatomy of the human face, found particular resonance during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, portraits of this era were laden with interpretations of the physiognomic narrative, an ekphrastic practice based on the claim that character of a person may be inferred from a visual representation of their face. Richard Brilliant explains *physiognomics* as the pseudo-science of face readings, a belief that the signs of a person's character were manifested in their face and that, with the proper method of analysis, one could learn to read those signs, and from them, know the character of the person whether in person or as portrayed by the artist.[61] In addition, Ernst Gombrich refers to it as a schema of physical features (physiognomic indicators) whether established from social norms or invented in which an artist can convey information about a subject through representation.[62] Thus, the mechanics of the face was treated as an [ideal] type which signified personality in the mind to the beholder. Barbara Stafford's particular view on the eighteen century fascination with imagining the unseen is that visual perception cannot be achieved according to some formal system of facial profiles or types but intuition, the ability of the mind to perceive truth or reality.

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[60] Daniel Fischlin. "Political Allegory, Absolutist Ideology, and the Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elisabeth 1." *Renaissance Quarterly* 50:1 (1997): 175-206.
[61] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 38.
[62] Ernst Gombrich. *Art and Illusion*, fifth ed. (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1977), 88–90.

Physiognomy should not be confused with phrenology, from the Greek 'phren' meaning mind and 'logos' meaning knowledge. The theory of phrenology sought to demonstrate the strengths and weakness of personality and behavior of a person could be explained by the shape of their head, with different physical markings indicating specific attributes or conditions. The theory that certain areas of the skull have localised and specific functions in relation to brain function was developed by German-Austrian physician Franz Joseph Gall in 1796. Like physiognomy, it also became a popular pseudo-science somewhat later in the early nineteenth century and was discredited as scientific theory by the 1840s. It became an obsolete amalgam of neuroanatomy and moral judgements about a person's intelligence, character and emotions that were located in twenty-seven specific parts of the brain. Phrenology analysed the indentations and bumps on the skull, as opposed to physiognomy which studied facial features. Even so, there was a belief that phrenology and physiognomy were able to link the physical, spiritual and psychological characterisations of a person to determine personality and behavior traits.

Although physiognomic specificity claimed scientific objectivity, Joanna Woodall advocates it was justified by the ancient, naturalised hierarchy of supposed divine–bestial balance within humanity; that is, psychological and physical resemblances between humans and animals. Facial features and physical characteristics were compared to anthropomorphised animals—the courageous lion, crafty fox or stupid cow—as well as dual comparisons in visual modes were made from angelic to monstrous, tall and short, smooth and rough, symmetrical and irregular. Woodall comments, "These visual languages respectively connoted the ideal and the grotesque; the recognised and the caricatured; the honoured or the denigrated … not only in portraits of 'great men', but in images of pathological and insane individuals".[63] Such parallels, however, were unlikely to provide any meaningful insights about identity or character of a person. For the most part, the reading of bodily gestures, facial expressions and features to discern personality based on arbitrary physiognomic characteristics was fraught, then as it is today. A modern intellectual viewpoint on face readings remind us

[63] Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject,* 6.

that people still judge and make assessments about character and personality, race and gender, on the basis of inferences about people's physical appearance, and no less in contemporary portraits. Physiognomic interpretations of the human face were also said to influence the development of character and sensibility of heroes and heroines in the eighteenth-century novel.

Indeed, the belief in the physiognomic expression of the 'essential being' based on external appearance was evident in a sustained enquiry by Swiss scholar Johann Caspar Lavater. By examining the philosophy behind Lavater's work, I make a link to the underlying reasoning of physiognomy with that of mimesis in Western portraiture during the eighteen and nineteenth centuries. Lavater viewed the relationship between the anatomy of the head and the emotional significance of the face in his study of physiognomy which culminated in three major written works.[64] In his essays from the 1780s and 1790s, he claimed character could be read in the human face, and more precisely the shadow profile. He believed the human face contained important information in its expression from which meaning with deep moral implications could be drawn as an indicator of the inner psyche of a person. Thus, the shape and structure of the face and head expressed a relationship between a person's physical appearance and their inner being. It followed that Lavater sought to assemble an encyclopedia of the human face in graphic representation, and in doing so, contribute to the understanding of moral character.

To support this reasoning, I draw on Victor Stoichita's analysis of Lavater's discourse on shadow drawing and physiognomy. First, Stoichita makes reference to historical discourse by D. Diderot in 1765 and J. J. Rousseau in 1781 who claimed to shed light on the fabled origins of painting as a myth of love, 'a heavenly transport' of adoration, not a visual expression.[65] Diderot and Rousseau refer to a Corinthian woman seen lovingly tracing the outlined shadow of her beloved on the wall with an arrow, as illustrated in Anne-Louis Girodet-

[64] Joan K Stemmler, "The Physiognomical Portraits of Johann Casper Lavater," *The Art Bulletin* 75:1 (March 1993): 151.
[65] Victor I Stoichita, "Johann Casper Lavater's Essays on Physiognomy and the Hermeneutics of Shadow," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 31, The Abject (Spring 1997): 128.

Trioson's engraving *The Origins of Painting* (1829). Second, he turns to Jacques Derrida in 1967 who makes sense of their comments by saying "it was also the first time that the outlined shadow was considered to be – not a primitive mode of pictorial expression – but a primitive language through which love expresses itself".[66] And lastly, Stoichita draws attention to Henry Fussli's (1801) observations of a popular parlour game of cut-outs called *silhouettes* during the second half of the eighteenth century which originated from a pun pertaining to Louis XV's Minister for Finance Etienne de Silhouette as a hollow man. More significantly, Lavater found the silhouette (a negative image of a person seen in profile) drawn with mechanical instruments to be more faithful and reliable evidence of physical likeness and subsequently character, as seen in figure 5 by Thomas Holloway et al. As a result, Lavater featured the new device for the creation of silhouettes in his essays.

Figure 5: Thomas Holloway et al., "A Machine for Drawing Silhouettes", from Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy* (London) (1792)

From this discussion, I make clear that Lavater considered the outlined profile in shadow as the truest visual expression of a person because it bore the marks of the inner being. The hallmark of Lavater's shadow analysis is that a man's shadow reflects his soul, not only a facial likeness and, more precisely, the outlined profile is the externalisation of the inner soul. Thus, it could be argued

[66] Ibid, Stoichita, 129.

that Lavater viewed the profile image as an expression of a person's moral and spiritual truth, that is, how close to or distant from the divine ideal. For him, the form of the bony skull and facial contours and the measurements derived from it were true indicators of character. Hence, the relationship of schematic lines to physical characteristics would lead to observations about character and inner being that formed the basis of his physiognomic geometric theory. Stafford affirms this view in her essay "For Lavater, silhouettes, although admittedly 'the feeblest of portraits,' are the most definitive and therefore the best tool for the physiognomist" although bereft of colour, features or volume.[67]

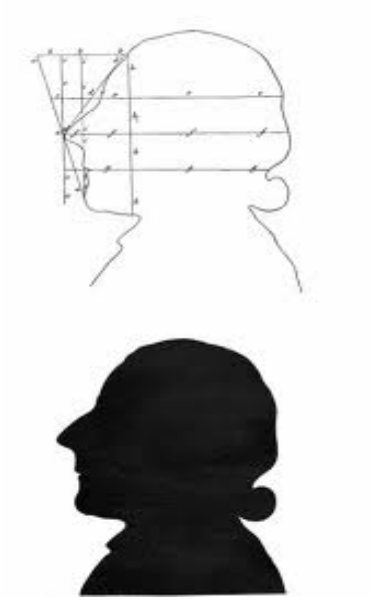

Figure 6: Silhouette in line engraving of Johann Casper Lavater from *Physiognomie*, 1783

Lavater used profile representations of himself in his works, as seen in figure 6. For him analysis of his own physiognomic likeness was more than an objective assessment of his theory. As an image of God, his face and visual representation was of major importance in the communication of information about himself and his moral character.[68] Even so, a key criticism of his analysis was the validity of his assessments of his own physiognomy and character and those of his friends because the analysis could be skewed towards what was already known, and

[67] Stafford, "Peculiar Marks: Lavater and the Countenance of Blemished Thought": 188.
[68] Stemmler, "The Physiognomical Portraits of Johann Caspar Lavater,": 153, 158.

thus could not be relied upon systematically. In addition, Lavater's pseudo-scientific method of face readings was based on preconceptions about gender, race, religious and cultural stereotypes of how people looked and behaved, and judgements about aesthetic values of beauty and spiritual truth.

Even though Lavater asserted the supremacy of nature over artistic practice, he valued portrait painting taken from life as a truthful visual representation of a person. He believed physiognomic likeness ought to express the same truth about a person's inner soul as their physical form in a portrait. And yet, when considering this argument in terms of his own image, he reacted unfavourably to portrait drawings of himself with an aged, lined and haggard visage. Significantly at age 49 (1790), in association with artist Johann Lips, Lavater re-shaped his portrait on the cover of his book[69] to satisfy his ego and self-perception about his own physical appearance, thereby yielding to the art of self-fashioning much like Erasmus of Rotterdam in the sixteenth century and the Virgin Queen a century later. Thus, I contend such self-fashioning of his own portrait could be regarded as nullifying his own theories of physiognomic specificity as true indicators of character and inner being.

As a consequence of its many misgivings, Lavater's hermeneutics of physiognomic perfection was regarded with skepticism by enlightened circles of the time because it lacked systematic criteria based on real scientific evidence for reading the face. John Graham makes clear that many commentators in Britain and Europe rightly argued that his works defied making an attempt at ordering its elements of physiognomics with any certainty and, without such an order it was impossible to use, other than as a popular means of judging character by the outline of facial features.[70] Nevertheless, there was much enthusiasm for the pseudo-science of physiognomy as the art of reading the inner soul and character of a person from external appearance, and admiration for Lavater at a time when people were seeking 'Enlightenment'.

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[69] Ibid, Stemmler, 165.
[70] John Graham, "Lavater's Physiognomy in England," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22:4 (October–December 1961): 572.

Authenticity

From this consideration of historical notions, the concept of authenticity with that of physical semblance is the third defining trope of Western portraiture. The preceding discussion of mimesis and physiognomy revealed that if a portrait does not present a convincing or veritable likeness of the sitter, then it is not considered authentic. This position necessitates further extrapolation because, in practice, a portrait is constructed by the artist in association with the subject that can be regarded as a fictitious act. Thus, the distinction between authenticity and fiction in the act of portrayal is of fundamental importance to this thesis in its analysis of contemporary portraiture.

The Victorian concept of the authentic portrait reveals a tension between a faithful rendering of what the sitter really looked like at the time a portrait was painted and its historic worth. In a recent essay, art historian Elisabeth Findlay argues that nineteenth century British historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle played a crucial role in defining the authentic portrait as one painted during the lifetime of the subject.[71] Notably, Carlyle subscribed to the physiognomic theory that the outward appearance reflects the inner self in which the viewer is given intimate knowledge of the subject. Carlyle considered the portrait as the embodiment of the sitter which allowed the viewer to see the sitter as the artist did at the time of painting, that is, a faithful rendering of the subject 'painted from life'. Portraiture was a means to link the past with the present, as historical documents of hero worship, says Paul Barlow.[72] For Carlyle, the authentic portrait was a sign of devotion to exemplary persons of society. Arguably, he was less than willing to acknowledge that portraits of the time may have concealed the truth rather than revealed it. In his study of Carlyle's work, Barlow explains the concept of authenticity originated from a perceived need for historical accuracy, with portraits as the true site of transcendent heroic identity and the arrest of the pictorial narrative.[73] The need to preserve the authority of

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[71] Elisabeth Findlay, "The Authentic Portrait Reconsidered," *Art & Authenticity*, ed. Jan Lloyd Jones and Julian Lamb (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, 2010), 34–42.
[72] Paul Barlow, "The Imagined Hero as Incarnate Sign: Thomas Carlyle and the Mythology of the 'National Portrait' in Victorian Britain," *Art History* 17:4 (1994): 524–525.
[73] Ibid, Barlow, 517–545.

the portrait as authentic and exemplary led to the foundation of the National Portrait Gallery in London in 1856. In doing so, a new importance was given to official portraiture that was less about the nature of the sitter or the artist than the institution that endorsed its historic worth, and continues today.

Findlay further argues a portrait painted from life retains its authenticity not because it reveals something of the character of the person but because it possesses an insight into the act of portrayal between sitter and artist, in terms of its composition, style, medium and symbolism. Importantly, the position that the act of portrayal is a creative collaboration between artist and subject further informs my research on contemporary portraiture.

In his writings, American art historian Harry Berger rejects the physiognomy of truth and likeness as a flawed concept and contends the portrait is highly constructed by both the artist and sitter and the only truth is the 'fiction of the pose'. Berger's close reading of iconography in Early Modern portraits led him to different and more convincing evidence that a reading of a face in a portrait does not reveal, and nor is it possible for an artist to reveal, the inner soul or character of the sitter. From this position, Berger challenges accepted historic notions of authenticity in portraiture. Berger contends portraits "are interpretations of their sitters, visual narratives for which we assume sitters and painters are, in varying degrees, responsible. In that sense, they are representations of both the sitter's and the painter's self-representation".[74] Berger further explains "A patron who commissions a portrait doesn't simply roll over and hold still while the painter portrays him, he gets himself portrayed; he participates in what, for him, is an act of self-portrayal, or self-presentation, or self-representation".[75]

Thus, Berger contends judgements about a person's character and status can be inferred as fictitious objectivity. In doing so, he exposes a fragility of truth in portraiture that both the artist and viewer can be influenced by what they think they know about the sitter, that is, an archive of knowledge. Importantly, Berger

[74] Harry Berger, Jr., "Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture," *Representations*, no. 46 (Spring 1994): 87.
[75] Harry Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt against the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 4.

challenges the audience to unravel the 'fictions of the pose', to understand what the sitter has 'in mind' rather than searching for the 'inner mind' of the sitter. Berger explains the act of posing was introduced by Leonardo da Vinci and his contemporaries in the Early Modern period when they depicted the convergence of physiognomic identity with mimetic 'idealism' by fashioning the portrait.

Figure 7: Holbein the Younger, *Erasmus*, 1523
Figure 8: Albrecht Durer, *Erasmus*, 1526

To illustrate Berger's theory of the fictions of the pose and its implications for authenticity in contemporary portraiture, I turn to the fashioning of Erasmus of Rotterdam in two portraits in the style of the Early Modern by Hans Holbein the Younger (figure 7) and Albrecht Durer (figure 8). The transaction between Erasmus and his two artist contemporaries to contrive an idealised semblance of him as a humanist scholar is evident in these two portraits. What is important to understand is Holbein's vision of the man acknowledged for his astute mind and scholarly works became regarded as the authoritative identity of the subject, despite the inscription on Durer's engraving that the portrait was 'taken from life' by the artist astoundingly three years later. Thus, Durer's vision of the subject was pre-determined by Holbein's 'authentic' portrayal of Erasmus. Richard Brilliant further explains that both Holbein and Durer 'convincingly' chose not to represent a significant moment in Erasmus' life but more

significantly, chose to construct a moment or fashion a truth that characterised his public persona, thereby consolidating a perception of him as a learned scholar in a portrait for posterity. Hence, the visual representation is "the fictive portrait through which Erasmus would be seen and remembered … as the true likeness of this great man, as if these artists had played no role in its creation".[76] The signifiers in such portraits served to make the subject the embodiment of 'ideals of public virtue' for the viewer's admiration, veneration and edification. Despite the differences in personal style, medium and composition authenticity was achieved because of the artists' consistent treatment of the subject.

As context for this thesis, I have questioned conventional thinking around the historical notions of mimesis, physiognomy and authenticity. I make clear a portrait is constructed by the artist in association with the subject and it is not a mere consequence of the act of portrayal in which likeness is revealed to the viewer as an authentic representation. Importantly for this thesis, portraiture is no longer defined or confined by these historical conventions and theoretical notions but is infused with an explosion of new forms of representation in response to the growth of new media technologies in the networked-digital age that have resulted in alternate conceptions of subjectivity.

What is a portrait

To conclude the first part of this chapter, I provide an understanding of what is a portrait for the purposes of this thesis.

The word *portrait* comes from the Latin word *protrahere* meaning to draw forth, disclose, reveal; to capture the inner essence; and to visualise the invisible. The Italian *verbritrarre* has meaning to portray or represent. A portrait cannot simply be understood or viewed as a visual representation of someone, something or someplace because everything would be regarded as a portrait and the genre would become meaningless.

[76] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 74.

The uniqueness of the individual is intrinsic to the Western ideal of portraiture which implies that subjectivity can be equated with the notion of the individual self, as distinct from social or cultural difference. In effect Western portraiture is characterised by the representation of the individual and with it semblance of likeness. No other genre depends as much on the artist conveying the physical embodiment of a human subject as the traditional Western portrait. Brilliant remarks "Simply put, portraits are art works, intentionally made of living or once living people by artists, in a variety of media, and for an audience".[77] Whereas, West contends the portrait can also expresses socio-political, psychological and artistic convention of a particular time and place in history. She comments:

> While a portrait can be concerned with likeness as contained in a person's physical features, it can also represent the subject's social positions or 'inner life', such as their character or virtues. A portrait can be subject to social or artistic conventions that construct the sitter as a type of their time; it can also probe the uniqueness of an individual in a way that sets the sitter apart from his or her context.[78]

While there is some validity in West's understanding of a portrait, it fails to take into account that a portrait in reality is unable to reveal a person's essential quality or 'inner life' in a visual representation, as previously discussed. A portrait, however, can be more than a passive rendering of likeness of the subject, it can convey something of the outward character of the subject from what is known or perceived by the artist using symbols, dress and pose. Portraits of notable people or historical figures may bestow authority or status because they are viewed as worthy of portrayal but readings of a subject's character or personality in a portrait is highly subjective. Moreover, an abstract expression of a person is less likely to bestow authority of mimesis and authenticity in the traditional sense of portraiture. An abstract expression may render the presence of the subject by contiguity as a memory, idea or sign. These

[77] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 8.
[78] West, *Portraiture*, 21.

simple definitions, however, belie the complexities of subjectivity and contradictions of mimetic representation that are addressed in this thesis.

Portraiture, like art more generally, is subject to historic conventions and changes in artistic practice over time, as well as social and cultural influences. I put forth a portrait is more than a creative collaboration between artist and subject concerned with achieving likeness, an evocation of an ideal or for that matter an abstract expression of a person, a portrait is a representation of social, cultural and national identity. By acknowledging Australia has an Indigenous heritage, colonial settler past and successive waves of migration, this thesis is compelled to understand contemporary portraiture in a broader sense that is inclusive of different cultures, social customs, traditions and identities.

Moreover, Australian Indigenous art has cultural meaning to the land which embodies spiritual identity of the past in the present. When considered in this way Indigenous portraits of country gives rise to an alternate concept of subjectivity in contemporary portraiture beyond the notion of individual sensibility as a marker of cultural identity. The subjectivity that emerges from contemporary Indigenous portraits is shaped by a cultural connection to country, *Dreamtime* creation stories set by ancestral precedent and not the individual. This represents a different way of seeing Indigenous art through a lens of cultural difference that liberates their art from the Western canon and history of art. This is not to say that Indigenous artists do not employ mimesis or an expression of human drama in a broader understanding of identity in contemporary Indigenous art and portraiture.

Postmodernism

In the second part of this chapter, I explore the influences of pluralism, pastiche and simulacra which are of intrinsic importance to this thesis in understanding the effects of postmodernism on contemporary portraiture which has become increasingly ambiguous and fragmented in form, style and subject matter.

First, I consider pluralism. The late twentieth century was a time of much socio-political and economic change as a condition of late capitalism and globalism. Such change and a disenchantment with the formalist ideals of modernism inspired a pluralist cultural ethos in art practice, it was no longer grounded in the artistic traditions in which avant-garde practices proliferated, and had no set goals.[79] What fundamentally changed in the conceptual understanding of art was a realisation that the linear progressive model for the creation of art from an established art form to the next avant-gardism was no longer feasible, resulted in greater freedoms of expression and a fragmentation of artistic practice.

Moreover, I contend an understanding of postmodernism with its 'anything goes' mantra is unthinkable without first considering modernism. American art critic Clement Greenberg argued formalism preserved the aesthetic values and purity of each medium and rejected the socio-political content in art, "thereby encouraging a separation between art and everyday human experience".[80] In his 1939 essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch,* he expressed his anxiety about the perceived power of mass culture to trivialise modern art and insisted only the avant-garde art that was free of popular culture was significant. He reasoned art's autonomy should be preserved against the incursions of capitalism, in doing so formalism would resist the debasement of high art into kitsch which is made expressly to entertain the masses. In essence, the relationship between medium and form espoused in Greenberg's critical theory came to be understood as the basis of modernism in art and the canon of aesthetic judgment. There were dissenters of course who challenged the formalist views, such as Marxist art historian T J Clark who believed aesthetic values must be connected to societal values 'as metaphors' and cannot be independent, as well as supporters, such as American art critic Michael Fried who interpreted aesthetic quality as stemming from the history of art although not necessarily or solely from the medium itself.

And yet, as West comments portraiture was disparaged in modernist critical theory, as the modernist ethos of universality and abstraction was said to be alien to the specificity of the portrait. She refers to Clive Bell who rejected

[79]David Hopkins, *After Modern Art 1945–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 197.
[80] Risatti, *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art*, xiii.

portraiture's artistic traditions of representation because for him mimesis was an imperfect way of expressing a person's characteristics over form and colour. According to his hypothesis "they [portraits] are not works of art. They leave untouched our aesthetic emotions because it is not their forms but the ideas or information suggested or conveyed by their forms that affects us", says West.[81] According to modernist aesthetic values, representation of the subject was of less significance than the formal qualities of line, shape and colour.

Further debates ensued about the efficacy of late modernist theory of formalism and aesthetic values were seen as too narrow and restrictive over social and cultural inclusion in art. Importantly, the opposition to the separation between art's formal qualities and the social fabric of life emerged as a central theme of postmodernism.[82] In the mid-late twentieth century, art and culture became as important as economics in determining cultural identity and political reality.

Art critic Hal Foster, however, guards against such an apocalyptic belief that anything goes results in the end of ideology and historicity which he considers is simply the inverse of the fatalistic belief that nothing works.[83] In his 1983 anthology *The Anti-Aesthetic* which draws on the writings of other theorists, he highlights uneven developments and opinions on the rupture of modernity and appositional postmodernism. Importantly, he cites the theories of Jean-Francois Lyotard on the loss of the universal narratives of modernism and Craig Owens on the crisis of Western society values culminating in postmodernism.

In 1979, Lyotard argues in his work *The Postmodern Condition* that there is no one way of viewing the world, no universal standard of judging historical, cultural and political truth, or speaking for all humanity in an age of fragmentation and pluralist thought. For Lyotard, postmodernism shaped a different world view to that of modernism, it heralded the end of the universal narratives that informed social enlightenment since the eighteenth century, a quintessential feature of modernity. This led to the splintering of knowledge into

[81] West, *Portraiture*, 180.
[82] Risatti, *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art*, 5–10.
[83] Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, x-xvi.

smaller narratives and arts into the spirit of experimentation before it becomes an accepted form.[84] It gave art a new legitimacy, no longer was the focus on modernist aesthetics of form and style over representation of the subject.

Craig Owens also observed that postmodernism questioned the hegemony of Western culture resulting in the rise of repressed discourses and the expansion of new art forms. For Owens, the feminist critique of patriarchy was a keystone of postmodernism resistance that constituted a crisis of social values centered on the male as subject and the female as other. He notes the second wave of feminism, with its critical dialogue to achieve gender equality, led to the emergence of feminist art practice. Owens contends feminism has been assimilated into other movements of liberation, self-determination and counterculture leading to a pluralism of representation and expression to disavow the narrative of mastery, male privilege and scopophilia.[85]

With the abandonment of modernist ideals of universality, postmodern art practice became supplanted with an eclecticism of ideas, forms, styles and media. The appropriation of past styles from histories of art led to the second influence of postmodernism, regarded as pastiche.

Art that succumbs to pastiche subverts the original meaning of the image by placing it into a new context in the present. For some commentators, however, the re-engagement with history was little more than nostalgia for the past and illusory individualism. Eleanor Heartney remarks Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson in 1984 was less than sanguine about the appropriation of past styles considering it a malaise of consumer capitalism that undermines society into a spectacle. In his description of pastiche, Jameson acknowledges the apparent ease with which contemporary artists and writers graze histories and gloomily concludes that "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through masks and with the voices of the

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[84] Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi, trans., *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 71–82.
[85] Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Other: Feminist and Postmodernism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 57–82.

styles in the imaginary museum".[86] Hence, pastiche provokes discourse about the lack of originality and authenticity in art practice.

It is worth noting here the idea of art lacking legitimacy may have surfaced with Marcel Duchamp's concept of the 'readymade' in the early twentieth century.[87] He shocked viewing audiences by conferring artistic ownership on appropriated readymade objects. Duchamp's ideals of paradoxical sensibility challenged conventional thinking about artistic authorship and originality of art objects. What transpired from his work was that the 'idea of art' which formed a legitimate expression of art could become as or more important than the original object. This position could also be said of much of the artwork of Andy Warhol in the 1950s and 1960s, which was an ensemble of simple images of commonplace things and repetitive pop culture portraits of famous people. Paradoxically, Warhol's reproduction *Brillo soap pad box* (1964) became accepted and appreciated by the art world as a legitimate artwork, not simply a visual representation of a product box. Conversely, Jeff Koons' work in the 1980s that drew on Duchampian and Warholian ideas was met with more resistance from art critics and audiences alike because it was regarded as a spectacle lacking legitimacy. Even so, Koons was an important artist of his generation says Scott Rothkopf "In Koon's hands, the readymade became, over the next three decades, an improbable poetic vehicle through which to conjure states of equilibrium and instability, fullness and emptiness, joy and disgust, life and death—the prosaic objects of the outer world made lapidary mirrors of our inner ones".[88]

Koons' artworks provoked superlatives, they were frivolous, shocking and controversial and yet they were beautifully crafted objects of seductive glitz, brightly coloured and shiny. As part of his *Banality* series in 1988, he transformed a life-sized gold gilt figure portrait of singer Michael Jackson and his

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[86] Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.
[87] The readymade is viewed as a commercial manufactured everyday item that the artist designates as an object of art or places it in a context that it demands to be called art. The artist thus eliminates the need for an artwork to be physically made by the artist, although it could be modified by the artist or assembled by others but is conceptualised as having some artistic or aesthetic meaning by the artist from its original purpose.
[88] Scott Rothkopf, *Jeff Koons: A Retrospective* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art) 2014, 17.

pet chimpanzee *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988) (figure 9) from everyday kitsch to high art by recalling the splendor of the Baroque-Rococo porcelain traditions and the singer's search for spirituality and whiteness. Jackson is portrayed in gold with porcelain white skin, highlighting not only the recognition of his celebrity status but also his ongoing desire for racial and sexual metamorphosis and acceptance by middle class America. With the figures dressed in matching band uniforms and surrounded by delicate blossoms, the sculpture draws on the traditional heroic portrait statue befitting the subject as a larger-than-life figure of pop culture, at the same time it resembles a child-like figure of innocence and banality with the singer disengaged from the viewer and the chimp clutching a blanket.[89]

Figure 9: Jeff Koons, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles,* 1988

It is also worth noting, American photographer Sherrie Levine challenged the notions of authenticity and originality in her photographic reproductions of the works of notable male photographers to highlight the undervalued role of female artists in the 1970s and 1980s. Controversially, she appropriated the photographic works of American Walker Evans from a catalogue of works in 1981. Levine photographed reproductions (a copy of a copy), not the original photographs, and presented them without manipulation as her own work. The

[89] The sensation of *Banality* made him a superstar but more transgressive art followed. Nothing was out of bounds, as he exploited society's taste and revolt of the banal, cute and perverse—no less his sexual self-portraits with porn-star and politician Ilona Staller.

works became known as a hallmark of post-modern pastiche despite a successful claim for copyright infringement by Evans' estate.

During the 1980s and 1990s, art became more of a commodity and the commodity was seen as art, no longer simply an object of art. This is an important factor in understanding how contemporary art became sensationalised, styled to look progressive with its radical content and high visual impact. The provocative gestures of Duchamp, Warhol and Koons tested the limits of what was considered art through the lens of appropriating everyday objects and subverting the power of the original image long before Damien Hirst with the shark in a tank. Similarly, in the twenty-first century, artists draw on imagery from popular culture by downloading material from internet sites and social media and reinterpreting it.

The emergence of the simulacrum. the third aspect of postmodernism, further brings into question notions of originality and authenticity in portraiture. As opposed to the representation of likeness of the subject in a portrait, the simulacrum is an illusion of reality without resemblance to an original.[90]

To understand the effects of simulacrum on contemporary portraiture, I draw on the writings of French philosopher Jean Baudrillard which are intrinsic to this thesis. In his 1981 groundbreaking work *Simulacra and Simulations*, Baudrillard argues the simulacrum is a simulation of reality, it represents an idea which becomes the reality but has no original. He contends, "when the image is more 'real' than any other 'reality', where there is only surface but no depth, only signifiers with no signifieds, only imitations with no originals, [thus] we are in the realm of *hyperreality"*.[91] I turn briefly to semiotics, the theory of signs as a frame of reference. The signified is the concept or subject the image represents

[90] Simulacrum comes from the Latin, meaning similarity or representation. According to Plato, there were two kinds of images: a true representation of an original subject or one that is intentionally distorted in order to make the copy appear real to the viewer from a particular perspective. The term was first used in the English language in the late sixteenth century to describe a representation of a subject in a painting or sculpture. By the nineteenth century, simulacrum became associated with an image of inferior or lesser value to that of the original.
[91] Sheila Faria Glaser, trans., *Simulacra and Simulations* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 14.

and the signifier is the form the image takes. In portraiture, a portrait (the signifier) is a representation of a subject, a person or place (the signified). Therefore, a viewer would read the signs in a portrait, such as established iconography in historical works, artistic conventions and cultural understanding, to interpret visual meaning and value.

What is apparent from Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality is its understanding of the effects of the growing influence of mass media hype on individual consciousness, societal values and visual culture. He puts forth the claim that imagery from mass media produces a passivity, an acceptance of what is represented to the point that the simulacrum becomes the reality. Thus, everyday communications through popular media and visual culture influence people's perceptions of reality. Celebrities and ordinary people create illusions of reality, fame and fortune that do not exist in the real world by uploading digitally enhanced portraits of themselves and veneers of lived experiences onto internet and social media sites for all to see. Indeed, the simulacrum in the networked-digital age further advances the notion of the constructed reality, as an illusion of truth, a seduction of the consumer or viewer. Here we can begin to understand the significance of his theory on contemporary portraiture.

From this analysis of postmodernist theory, I argue portraiture today is undergoing a revolutionary change, a shift in ideology in which our understanding of mimesis, physiognomy and authenticity is being challenged by the growth of new technologies. Furthermore, there has been change in the underlying philosophy of portraiture from portraits that are drawn, painted, sculpted and those associated with still photography, to portraits that are created and edited at will by artists and ordinary people on computers and hand-held devices using digital imaging and new media creating new ways of expression. This is resulting in greater freedoms of art practice beyond that of postmodern pluralism, pastiche and simulacrum in which portraiture is becoming increasingly ambiguous and fragmented in form, style and subject matter in the networked-digital age. That said, some contemporary artists are ignoring the rising tide of new technologies by favouring established media and accepted iconography.

Becoming contemporary

Contemporary art, and with that contemporary portraiture, can be hip, glitzy, shocking or succumb to the latest fashion or sensation as it "surrenders its critical impulse and becomes itself just another hot item in the shop window of current visual culture", says Terry Smith.[92] Contemporary art and portraiture can also be unpopular because they may enrage art conservatives and audiences with ideas that are contrary to what is accepted or has gone before. Julian Stallabrass comments that contemporary art has a freedom that separates it from the mundane character of everyday life which is more an ideal than a rationale of mass market appeal.[93] That said, the term 'contemporary' in art and portraiture is still something of a misnomer. It can denote art made today, more recently or even art of the twentieth century which people may not regard as contemporary. So when is contemporary art and portraiture no longer considered contemporary? This question is becoming increasingly important for the art establishment and art market more generally in the twenty-first century.

Arguably, the term 'contemporary' has come to replace the term 'modern' and 'postmodern' as a descriptor of art made today. In this third part of the chapter, I pose three possible explanations for this.

First, I explain what is meant by the words contemporary and modern historically and how are they used today. I begin with Smith's rather wordy explanation of the historical origins of the word modern.

> In the ancient world, around the shores of the Mediterranean, the word *modern* (*modernus*) distinguished a mood, or mode, of fullness emergent in the otherwise ordinary passing of time and within the predictable unfolding of fashion (*hodiernus*, "of today") … manifest as a quality later called newness–persisted until late medieval times, when contrast with what was seen to be the past,

[92] Terry Smith, "What Is Contemporary Art? Contemporaneity and Art to Come," *Journal of Art History* 71:1, 2 (2002): 4.
[93] Julian Stallabrass, *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–6.

> and then several periods, became central to the meaning of modern … until it became, in a paradox tolerated by most, historical.[94]

Put simply, the word contemporary was formed in ancient Latin from two words *con* and *tempus* meaning *with* and *time*. Historically, contemporary in its ordinary usage had less resonance than the term modern. Today, the word contemporary is largely concerned with belonging to, from, at or during the same or present time, age or period which has a distinct sense of connectedness to the present.[95] Thus, in everyday usage the word contemporary defaults to whatever is happening now, up-to-date, cutting edge or fashionable. There lies a danger, however, in taking contemporary as being only of the moment, with no influences of the past and no considerations for the future. Referencing art of today as simply contemporary of its time says little more than the banal fact that it is being made now regardless of its impetus or relevance. This could have been said at any time in the past about art being produced in the present.

Second, its usage in the modern age adds further confusion, as contemporary serves as a default for the term modern in common usage which also means up-to-date or fashionable, not antiquated. Modern became the word for a core set of terms that embraced a modern age of art, architecture and design, that is modernism which was subsequently replaced by postmodernism, as discussed earlier.

In the 1980s, however, the term contemporary replaced modern and postmodern as a descriptor of the consequential art of our time as "art now".[96] Even so, Smith highlights contemporary art could also be seen as a continuation and revision of modernism. He cites art critic Arthur Danto's view on contemporary:

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[94] Terry Smith, "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity," *Critical Inquiry* 32:4 (Summer 2006): 681–707.

[95] *Macquarie Concise Dictionary*, fifth edition (reprinted 2010), defines contemporary as: 1. Belonging to the same time; existing or occurring at the same time; 2. Of the same age or date; 3. Of the present time; 4. In the most modern style; up to date; 5. Someone belonging to the same time as another or others; 6. A person of the same age as another.

[96] Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?*: 5.

> So just as 'modern' has come to denote a style and even a period and not just recent art, 'contemporary' has come to designate something more than simply the art of the present moment. In my view, however, it designates less a period than what happened after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art, and less a style of making art than a style of using styles.[97]

A third way of understanding what is meant by the contemporary in art and portraiture is to contexualise it within a global structure of similarity and difference, that is, contemporaneity.

Globalisation in the late 1980s led to the institutionalisation of the art market with its expansion of public museums and private galleries, the elevation of the curator and the growth of temporary 'blockbuster' exhibitions as key influences in shaping contemporary art overrun with consumerism, says art critic Brandon Taylor.[98] It also led to an explosion of the art market in 1989 in which contemporary art became more fashionable and desirable by art collectors, including traditional Australian Aboriginal art expressed in a contemporary way.[99] Indigenous art has challenged and excited audiences to accept new ways of thinking about art and portraiture and shifted the boundaries of art practice from what was known and accepted to the unknown.

In keeping with this, Smith argues contemporary art is infused with its own values, discourse and multiple modes of contemporaneity. He explains art critics and audiences should not assume that developments in contemporary art are of the art itself but which emerges instead from the contemporaneousness of lived differences and cultures and the proliferating global subcultures of art biennials, triennials, public and private galleries, and art patrons.[100] Thus, contemporary art and portraiture in Australia and internationally engages culturally, politically and economically with audiences worldwide in different ways.

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[97] Arthur C. Danto, cited in Smith "What is Contemporary Art? Contemporaneity and Art to Come,": 8.
[98] Taylor, *Contemporary Art: Art Since 1970*, 22–24.
[99] Ian McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 2011); "Provincialism Upturned," Third Text 23:5 (2009). 625-632.
[100] Smith, "What is Contemporary Art? Contemporaneity and Art to Come,": 3.

Portraiture in the networked-digital age

Examining the effects of digital technology and new media on contemporary portraiture in the networked-digital age is an essential narrative for this thesis. In this final part of this chapter, I contextualise how these technologies and the desire for social connectedness is revolutionising contemporary portraiture. Michael Desmond makes an important point by stating:

> There can be no doubt that we are entering an exceptional time for portraiture and visual culture in general as the art world embraces the digital age. Traditional portraiture is responding to the application of new technologies and this imaging process is reshaping our interpretation and reading of the face.[101]

Such is the pervasiveness of the digital phenomenon in contemporary visual culture and society today. Digital technologies are reshaping and expanding our understanding of what is a portrait. Digital imaging gives photographers and ordinary people powerful tools to seamlessly construct and transform images into an alternate truth to the 'objective' imprint of reality. It is important to note here that a digital image may appear authentic on the surface but there is no certainty that its genesis lies in reality, hence a simulacrum.

By way of explanation, a digital image differs from that of an analogue image in the way it is created, displayed and stored. The digital image has no original negative film from which to make reproductions. In the twenty-first century, an image is generated on a digital platform whether that is a hand-held device or computer screen, and stored on digital files, memory sticks, internet and social media sites, and 'cloud servers'. Thus, the digital platform functions as a storehouse of images, much like family photo albums of analogue photographs as records of a past era.

At the same time, this revolutionary change has brought confusion about the nature of new technologies, new media technologies, applications and terminology. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'new media' is used because

[101] Desmond, *Present Tense*, 2.

of its inclusiveness. British academic Martin Lister makes clear that new media is an overarching term that has broad social, cultural and global resonance that applies to a range of new communication and technical phenomena, in terms of both aesthetic and technical specificity, as part of a new 'technoculture'. Lister further states the key characteristics of new media are digital, interactive, hypertexual, virtual, networked and simulated.[102] Hence, new media has resulted in a differentiation and segmentation of new technologies and aesthetic that are no longer characterised by uniformity nor limited to mass media content. Until the late twentieth century, the word 'media' was generally understood to be the plural of 'medium' afforded by the type of material or technique used by an artist or point of media production: print, electronic, film, advertising and photography. The opportunity for artistic experimentation and the ease of application using new technologies has resulted in an explosion of new media art today. Christiane Paul remarks that using digital technologies as an artistic medium implies that the work exclusively uses the digital platform from production to presentation and its distinguishing features certainly constitute a distinct form of aesthetics, however, digital art itself has multiple manifestations and is extremely hybrid.[103] Importantly, it is not the technology itself but the way in which artists use new technology that gives the digital medium presence and new media art meaning in the networked-digital age.

I draw on an earlier distinction made by German theorist Walter Benjamin in the 1930s when he exposed the notion of originality in film and photography as a myth, a fraudulent mask of the subject. Despite its relative brevity, Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) posed provocative questions on the effects of technical reproducibility of art works and the place of art in society of the time that had profound impact on modern aesthetic criticism. He advocated first, the authenticity of an art work is

[102] Lister, *New Media,* 10–13.
[103] Paul, *Digital Art*, 67.

diminished with reproduction and second, the reproduced image is subject to socio-political manipulation.[104] The reason for this is twofold.

First, Benjamin concluded that the displacement of an image from its original context in the age of mechanical (technological) reproduction would strip it of its 'aura' that being the special quality of the original work, by reducing its authenticity and aesthetic ideals. Furthermore, he interpreted the revolutionary change that modern technological reproduction played in shaping the aesthetic experience through the effects of still photography and film lacked an authentic aura of the source. In effect, he believed the aura of an original artwork could not be transferred to a mechanical reproduction, such as a photographic print. "To an ever greater degree the work of art [or portrait] reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility".[105] Thus, for Benjamin in the age of technological reproducibility an artwork's authenticity as an aesthetic object was called into question by virtue of it being a reproduction, a simulation that had become detached from the original and its social reality. Important for this thesis, he acknowledges that the reception of the human countenance, that is the human face, does not give way without resistance because of the entrenched notion of mimesis. It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. He explains:

> The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty. But as man withdraws from the photographic image, the exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to the ritual value.[106]

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[104] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217–251; Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, in *Selected Writings, Vol. 4 1938-1940,* ed Michael Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003), 251–283.
[105] Ibid, Benjamin (1968), 224.
[106] Benjamin (2003), 258-59.

Second, Benjamin concluded the reproduction could become politicised as a tool to influence the perceptions of the masses (people). He related changing perceptions to bourgeois and fascist ideologies which provoked revolutionary demands on art and politics in the early twentieth century. He remarks "Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives change[s] over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception … if changes in the medium of present-day perception can be understood as a decay of the aura, it is possible to demonstrate the social determinants of that decay".[107] In this context, Benjamin responded to the political urgency of the time by writing a collection of essays through historical allegories and social critiques of the present. His grand expose of the socio–economic changes of nineteenth century Parisian life after 1850, the *Arcades Project,* was a metaphor for the catastrophic socio–political events taking place in Europe during the 1930s. Here the reader encounters the figural image of the anonymous 'flaneur' (a figure identified by Charles Baudelaire in his "The painter of modern life", 1863) who promenades leisurely through the arcades interior spaces along the grand boulevards, as a symbol of lost identity.[108] He was convinced of a synchronicity between the emergence of urban–industrial capitalism in the 1850s and the political upheaval in the 1930s. Like Benjamin, Shearer West examined the cultural malaise of a decadent society at the fin de siècle, with its abandonment of morality in the search for beauty through symbolism in avant-garde art, literary prose and the performing arts. She highlighted the cultural mélange of the old and new: the confines of Victorian society and the revolutionary ethos of modernism. Hence, visual art, literature, growth of photography and mass communications facilitated the spread of social and political anxieties well into the new millennium.[109]

Notwithstanding the importance of Baudrillard's theories of hyperreality, and the significance of Benjamin's writings on how technical reproduction undermines the existence of the original and new technologies give form to new art styles and social change, the networked-digital age is resulting in new art

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[107] Benjamin (2003), 255.
[108] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 31.
[109] Shearer West, *Fin De Siecle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), 1-15.

forms and spectatorship of a different kind outside the conventional arena of the gallery setting. In his critique of the contradictions of contemporary art British art critic Julian Stallabrass comments "Walter Benjamin's old point still holds: a radical art needs to do more than make politic its subject–matter; it must change the way it is made, distributed, and seen".[110] Stallabrass contends that from the mid-1990s with the rise of the internet, the dematerialisation of the art work viewed over multiple digital platforms, and subsequent cannibalisation or modification by users has contested democratic art practice by blurring the line between makers and viewers—such interventions continue today.

Furthermore, in 1992 American academic William J Mitchell asserted that "From the moment of its sesquicentennial in 1989 photography was dead—or, more precisely, radically and permanently displaced".[111] In other words, the impact of digital imaging had given rise to a new way of seeing the photographic image from an 'objective' visual record to one of uncertain status in which the viewer is unable to distinguish between an original and a simulacrum, as espoused by Jean Baudrillard. In a later essay on digitalisation in 2001, art historian Geoffrey Batchen comments computer visualisation using digital technologies "allows photographic-style images to be made in which there is potentially no direct referent in an outside world", that is "to have no origin other than their own computer program".[112] He affirms Baudrillard's theory by saying digital images are not signs of reality but signs of signs that may be *in* time but not *of* time. He believes this shift in significance of the image has as much to do with the general epistemological changes of society and technological advancements.

The pervasiveness of new technologies dominated by digital imaging and new media forms represent the changing character of portraiture today. New media encourages artists and audiences to think beyond the strictures of aesthetic form and content to social praxis and phantasmagoria to form a new temporal reality

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[110] Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: the Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 191.
[111] William J Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Massachusettes: Massachusettes Institute of Technology, 1992), 20.
[112] Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Massachusettes: Massachusettes Institute of Technology, 2001), 139–140.

of portraiture surpassing postmodernity. Furthermore, the engagement with social media and internet sites is expected to become all the more pertinent medium for people at all levels of society to display images of themselves and others online. Ordinary people want to see not only celebrity portraits on internet sites but also portraits of themselves on social networking sites within the context of social connectedness. The seductive and uncanny capacity of digital portraits taken and viewed on hand-held devices and uploaded onto social media is both enhancing and limiting peoples' lives.

While portraiture is undergoing a revolutionary change due to the growth of digital technologies and advances in new media, I argue contemporary portraiture from the 1990s to 2010s is a synthesis of both traditional modes of representation and new art forms. The portrait, whether painted, sculpted or photographed as a visual representation of a subject, remains compelling with its ability to engage artists and audiences alike, whereas the selfie is becoming a marker of social and personal identity in the twenty-first century. At the same time, how artists and ordinary people use and adapt digital technologies as a modern medium of creativity across multiple media platforms in the networked-digital age is a key driver in changing how we view portraiture.

In this chapter, I have analysed the historic notions of portraiture and explained key concepts which have theoretical and practical significance for contemporary portraiture. An understanding of this crucial material has been necessary to contextualise the two main themes of inquiry of this thesis: those portraits that have vestiges of the historic notions of mimesis and authenticity and those in which the links have become fragile and contestable.

In each of the following six chapters, I explore a particular sub-theme of contemporary portraiture.

CHAPTER TWO: PORTRAITS OF THE NATION, CULTURE AND PLACE

Portraiture remains compelling in its capacity to portray a nation, its people, culture and place.

A portrait can capture more than significant events in history, the achievements of exemplary people and the lives of ordinary citizens, it can shape identity. There is no single identity, rather a multitude of different identities that form who we are as a multicultural nation and our way of life. Indeed, how people come to know and make sense of identity occurs through visual imagery, the written and spoken word, as well as popular culture. And yet, identity is formed from ideologies, values and customs that exist within all cultures and societies in which people live. Ideologies also inform religious beliefs, political views, social order and world views in which dominant assumptions or universal meanings can become accepted or contested by peoples of different cultures or ethnicity. The relationship of people to the land also forms ideas of identity and a sense of place.

In this second chapter, I explore how contemporary portraits of our past and present continue to shape the imaging of our multicultural nation in new ways. They do this by reflecting on the changing fabric of Australian society from what was previously and narrowly understood as British colonial to one of many cultures, ethnicity, religious beliefs and social customs. I also examine how portraits of people connect with the landscape. Indigenous artists express their identity as an embodiment of their spiritual and cultural connection to the land.

This chapter is divided into three parts.

First, I explore the changing demographics of Australian society. I examine how Anne Zahalka appropriates historic images of the past and those that are culturally familiar in the present and reworks them with new meanings into portraits of a nation. In doing so, she documents how our national identity is continuously unfolding with the influx of new migrants and settlers. Second, I show how Chinese-Australian artists Guan Wei and Ah Xian reclaim their past by experimenting with traditional iconography and/or methods from their cultural heritage and view their present by using modern symbolism in their contemporary portraits. I also consider the contemporary video installations of Japanese video artist Tabaimo. Third, I examine contemporary Indigenous portraiture—photographic portraits and portraits of country. Here I begin by examining how photographers Fiona Foley, Destiny Deacon, Darren Siwes and Ricky Maynard explore themes of dispossession and inequality in the treatment of Aboriginal people with realism and satire. What is particularly apparent in their photographs is they seek to unsettle prevailing stereotypes about the lives of Indigenous people. Last I explore the significance of the land as a visual and spiritual marker of Indigenous cultural identity as portraits of people and country.

In order to explore how contemporary portraiture expresses the identity of a nation, its people, culture and place, I first provide some historical context on how provincialism, ethnic pluralism and visual culture has shaped a nation. The rise of Australian Indigenous contemporary art is a significant development on the world art scene.

The expanded migration of peoples from Eastern and Southern Europe after World War Two from the late 1940s to 1960s; and Asia, Middle Eastern and African countries from the 1970s onwards, has contributed to transforming Australia's identity from mostly British (colonial) to a nation of many cultures.[113]

[113] In his history of Australia from 1688-1980, Richard White detailed the population breakdown of the nation at the time of Federation (1901) as: 98% of British decent, 77% Australian born, 10% from England and Wales, 5% from Ireland, and 3% from Scotland). The largest non-British migrant groups were Chinese (8%) and Germans (1%). Notably, the Indigenous population of an estimated 67,000 Aboriginals was not counted in the population statistics at the time nor included in the Constitution. Loyalty to the British empire and the homogeneity of the vast majority of the population from a white Anglo-Celtic

I argue Australia is no longer confined by historic references to its colonial settler past and cultural associations to Britain in shaping its identity; it now embraces the cultural traditions and symbolic iconography of its Indigenous and migrant peoples. This heightened sense of Australia's multiculturalism, a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures, has shaped a less didactic Western approach to identity in art and portraiture. It is worth noting that in 1994, the first Australian Government cultural policy *Creative Nation* made reference to the importance of Indigenous and migrant cultures in creating a national cultural identity.

Furthermore, history has shown a global sub-culture of the visual arts through which art and portraiture presents itself to audiences all over the world expanded during in the late 1980s. This was synonymous with globalism that liberated Australians from the tyranny of distance and insularity that had become embedded in the Australian psyche in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the mid-1960s, Geoffrey Blainey explained that Australia's cultural cringe and parochialism was a product of the country's historic isolation and vast distance from the colonial power Britain.[114] Similarly, A A Phillips highlighted a few years earlier that a national sentiment of inferiority to that of Britain and Europe had led to a cultural cringe and crisis of national identity.[115] Cultural cringe is understood as being connected with cultural abandonment, devaluing one's own culture or cultural background for a known superior or colonising culture from which approval is sought. In 1974, Terry Smith commented this was symptomatic of a 'provincialist bind' that failed to acknowledge the ability of the provinces to influence art discourse and accept an Australian way of seeing

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background could not be denied. After World War 2, a new Australian identity emerged within the context of multiculturalism that shaped the nation. A large proportion of the migrants to Australia between 1947-1964 were not British. Migrants, however, were expected to assimilate into the 'Australian way of Life', thereby denying the existence of other cultural traditions for social unity. By the 1970s, however, Australia was promoted as a pluralist, tolerant and multicultural society or what Gough Whitlam referred to as the 'new nationalism'. Richard White, *Reinventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 111–114, 159–160, 169.

[114] Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1966).

[115] AA Phillips, *The Cultural Cringe*, (Melbourne: F W Cheshire, 1958), 89.

art and culture despite small numbers of significant Australian artists showing their works in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s.[116]

Academic Ian McLean remarks the same tactics were still being used in the 1980s and 1990s but by the early 2000s, the effect of provincialism had rapidly diminished and Third World artists were enjoying an institutional breakthrough from Eurocentrism. Consequently, the rise of globalism brought with it a Third World challenge posited by Indigenous art from localised cultures that was slowly displacing the Western cultural dominance of world art.[117] He explains:

> The provincials have had their revenge. China now props up capitalism, evidence that the West is losing its former hegemony, and with it the illusion that modernity is a specifically Western development … non-Western artists are no longer infiltrated or smuggled into the mainstream. Instead they enter on the red carpet.[118]

McLean refers to the triumph of the earlier Papunya Tula art in the 1970s, with its abstract acrylic paintings from the Western Desert remote communities, as spearheading the contemporary Aboriginal art movement in Australia as a localised phenomenon that went global in the 1980s. The paintings were based on designs traditionally expressed on the body, ground or objects during ceremonies that embodied cultural myths and sacred sites. Aboriginal artists decoded their inviolate cultural and spiritual narratives into a modern visual narrative that embodied the past in the present. He comments Aboriginal art was once considered out of time, that is, an ancient art of a dead culture of primitive people who were regarded as anthropological figures of a 'dying' race unable to affect their future but suddenly it seemed more than timely by being understood as contemporary art.[119] What followed was the proliferation of diverse art styles created by Aboriginal artists in remote, regional and urban

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[116] Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum* 13:1 (September 1974), 54–59.
[117] Ian McLean, "Provincialism Upturned," *Third Text* 23:5 (2009): 625–632.
[118] Ibid, McLean, 628–629.
[119] Ian McLean, "Aboriginal Art and Globalisation," in *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*, (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, 2010), 212.

areas, some of whom have gained global recognition, such as photographer Tracey Moffatt and bark painter John Mawurndjul. Anthropologist Luke Taylor, however, highlights that the diversity of contemporary Aboriginal art brought with it a succession of problems about definition because it did not conform to existing ideals of Australian-world art formulations of what is Indigenous art.[120]

Indeed, the success of Aboriginal art within the postmodern orbit rocked the art world in the 1980s and the shock waves were felt throughout the 1990s and beyond but it came at a price—its perceived inauthenticity was set against its previous anthropological framing in an attempt to mainstream Indigenous art practice. Scholar and Aboriginal activist Marcia Langton argues the suspicion of inauthenticity of contemporary Aboriginal art, primarily created by urban-based artists, was because it was insufficiently 'primitive' and became labelled as 'mere decorative objects' in the minds of popular consciousness. Some urban-based Indigenous artists may present a concurrence of cultural concerns in their works and also fail to meet expectations of 'Aboriginality' in the iconography and symbolic narrative. Other urban artists, however, may choose to move away from ethnic categorisation and embrace the postmodern ethos of multiplicity.

Langton further argues the authenticity of Indigenous artists' spiritual practices and aesthetic sensibility must be taken seriously rather than assimilated into the universal aesthetic of global contemporaneity as another postmodern hybrid art. She comments:

> Aboriginal spirituality is the difference that makes the difference … first, because it can be the only basis for an ethical relationship between Aborigines and the wider Australian world. Second, it plays an important subversive role … Third, [it] makes available a rich tradition of human ethics of relations with place and other species to a worldwide audience.[121]

She further explains that spiritual content and iconography in Aboriginal art is expressed as the 'secret-sacred' of inside traditional knowledge in rituals by

[120] Luke Taylor, *Painting the Land Story* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia) 1999, 12.
[121] Ibid, Taylor, 62.

Indigenous people, and non-secret-sacred outside knowledge of Indigenous designs mostly seen in gallery settings. Hence, Aboriginal cultural relationships with country through these Dreamings remain divergently imagined from Western cultural understanding and art traditions. Importantly, Langton contends "It is not simply material beauty that imbues objects with importance. They are collected and valorised because important meanings are recognised … Aboriginal art expresses the possibility of human intimacy with landscapes. This is the key to its power".[122] These meanings of Indigenous people's cultural and spiritual embodiment to the land past and present is what constitutes a distinct sense of cultural identity that can be understood as portraiture.

The importance and increased recognition globally of Aboriginal contemporary art with its ability to express an ancient culture in a contemporary way by employing non-traditional materials, medium and forms has had a profound impact on the course of contemporary art and portraiture in Australia. Indigenous art is a defining characteristic of Australia's cultural landscape and national identity. And yet the full impact of Aboriginal contemporary art both locally and globally has yet to be fulfilled, as audiences consciously and unconsciously absorb new artistic forms and expressions of cultural and individual sensibility in the twenty-first century.

Moreover, photography has played a significant role in documenting the changing cultural, social and political landscape of Australia. Indeed, the growth in popularity of photography in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries influenced the genre of portraiture much like the rapid pace of new media does today. In the past, formal photographic portraits staged and captured young soldiers before going to war, explorers, traders, wealthy families and politicians, as well as dispossessed Indigenous peoples subjugated by the colonial power. The latter highlights misconceptions about Aboriginal culture. Photography, however, was not only about creating a documentary or ethnographic record but an expression of pictorial curiosity about everyday happenings of ordinary people in society. Vernacular photography became witness to the daily lives of

[122] Marcia Langton, "Dreaming Art," in *Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation and Cultural Difference*, ed. Nikos Papastergiadis, (London: Rivers Oran Press, 2003), 42–55.

people of many cultures, ethnic and social groups, including Indigenous Australians.

Documenting the nation

I begin by examining the staged documentary portraits by Anne Zahalka. Her photographs of everyday Australians in domestic and iconic settings with an assemblage of symbolism are a modern portrayal of nationhood. Her portraits are less about mimesis and more about what they represent, as she questions dominant cultural myths about what constitutes Australian identity. Informed by postmodern notions, Zahalka appropriates familiar images from the past and re-stages them with new meanings in present. She does this by using both conventional photographic approaches and digital imaging to enhance the composition and theatrical artifice of her photographs.

Zahalka believes our historical understanding of Australian nationhood came from how the early Australian painters of British and European decent perceived and portrayed the Australian landscape. She remarks:

> … exploring Australian identity and looking at the mythology and the stereotypes that have been produced has come really from how the early Australian impressionists carved out a sort of new landscape for Australia that differed to that of England. At the same time, the style of painting had come from a knowledge of European painting tradition. And within that, there were the figures of the heroic pioneers, bushmen and new settlers, and so on.[123]

Although they were impressionist works, Zahalka feels that these images of the Australian landscape were important because they shaped a new nation.[124] She

[123] Interview with the artist, Appendix Eleven, 381.

[124] Australian impressionism was a combination of observation of real life and pictorial convention. In his work "City Bushmen: the Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology, 1985 Leigh Astbury highlights how a circle of artists in nineteenth century Australia examined art in a social and cultural context. These impressionist artists helped to develop the rural mythology extant in Australia—the bush landscape, spirit of the pioneer, masculine labour that became distinguished by characteristics of hardship, resilience, heroism and romantised in the psyche of the nation.

says this has informed her thinking about the images she recreates and meanings behind her work. She references well-known paintings and photographs and substitutes modern people and objects into a contemporary frame and narrative. She says "I like to work with familiar images that people immediately know and then somehow twist them to get people to question what they're thinking and represent them with a new meaning, So I appropriate familiar images from the past and reconstruct them to tell another part of the story".[125]

Figure 10: Max Dupain, *The Sunbaker*, 1937 (1970)
Figure 11: Anne Zahalka, *The Sunbather*, 1989

In her early work, she harked back to how a nation immortalised the beachscape as the embodiment of the Australian way of life in the twentieth century. In 1989, Zahalka restaged Max Dupain's iconic image *Sunbaker* (1937) (figure 10) with her image *The Sunbather* (1989) (figure 11). She transformed the iconic sun bronzed Australian male of pure physical form with his muscular shoulders and arms into a thinner pale skinned red haired 'anybody' using heightened colour over black and white film with its play of shadows. The work arouses feelings of nostalgia by returning to an earlier period in Australian history of a young nation and the glorification of a healthy, leisurely lifestyle, however, Zahalka disrupts these feelings by reinventing the scene with a less than heroic image of an ordinary person lying on the sand in the Australian sun.[126]

[125] Interview with the artist, Appendix Eleven, 386.
[126] The image part of her series *Bondi, Playground of the Pacific* (1989).

By contrast, the portrait of actor David Gulpilil as *The Movie Star* (1985) (figure 12) photographed by Tracey Moffatt four years earlier than Zahalka unashamedly makes reference to Australia's colonial past and the dispossession of Aboriginal people against the recurring presence of the beach as a lexicon of Australian visual culture. The actor who is shown with traditional Aboriginal 'dot' markings on his face instead of the ubiquitous zinc sun cream for fair skinned beach goers, reclines casually on a yellow car bonnet wearing multicoloured 'boardies', listens to music on a 'boom box', holds a 'tinny' of Fosters beer, the famous Bondi Beach with its luminous blue water and white sand in the background. The photograph of Gulpilil seeks to challenge established notions about the place of Aboriginal people in Australian society by replacing the sun–bronzed white European beach goer with an Indigenous man. It could be said the image had unintended negative connotations because of the association of the beer can with alcohol dependence in Aboriginal communities.

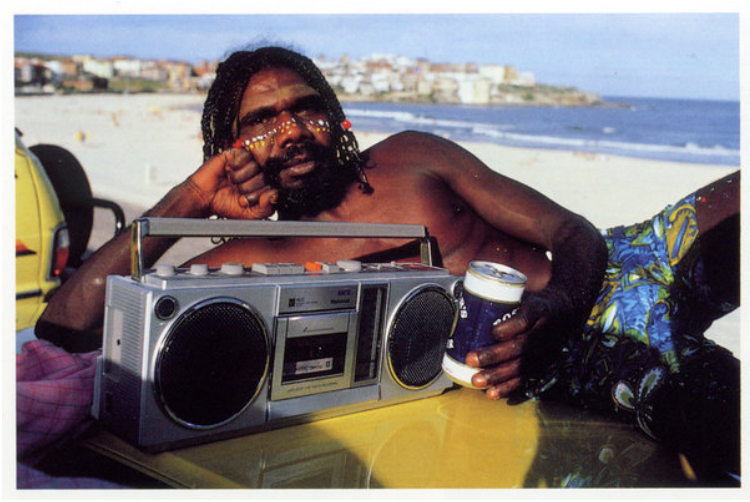

Figure 12: Tracey Moffatt, *The Movie Star*, 1985

As a signature piece of her oeuvre, Zahalka portrays the changing demographic of Australian society in her parody of Charles Meere's painting *Australian Beach Pattern* (1940) (figure 13) as the *The Bathers* (figure 15) in 1989 and again twenty-three years later in *The New Bathers* (figure 16) in 2012. Zahalka is contesting both long-held notions of Australian national pride and meanings of identity by re-imaging the beach scene in these portraits. Importantly, her photographs depict a notable change in the composition of Australia's cultural

identity from one of Anglo-Celtic mono-culture to the inclusion of migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (1989), and Asia, Middle Eastern and African countries (2012) as an image of multicultural Australia. Her understanding of cultural difference may reflect her own lived experience as the daughter of European immigrants. By doing so, Zahalka reflects on the composition of modern Australian society, with its many ethnic groups and cultures, using Australian beach culture. In her portraits, ordinary people have different body shapes and sizes as a reflection of the population, unlike Meere's beach goers.

Figure 13: Charles Meere *Australian Beach Pattern,* 1940
Figure 14, Freda Robertshaw, *Australian Beach Scene*, c1940

Conversely, Meere's work depicts an allusion of a heroic, optimistic Anglo-Celtic society during the inter-war period in a tableau of idealised beach goers painted in a neo-Classical style to emulate classical ideals of body perfection and heroic symbolism. His painting of Bondi Beach in 1940 "encapsulates the myth of a fit healthy young nation symbolised by the tanned, god-like bodies of the sunbathers … as a still-life of suspended strength".[127] Meere's representation of nationhood privileges the white Australian male and heightened masculinity as the focal point of the image, favouring one male standing proud drying himself with a towel and another carrying a child on his shoulders. Women are seen as carers of children and subordinate to men. Exceptions are the young women who like young men, are body conscious and active. The young women at the top

[127] www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/charlesmeere.

right of the painting playing ball on the beach—one woman is shown about to hit a large beach ball away from other young women. Surprising is an image of the iconic 'Mickey Mouse' Disney character on the child's bucket in the left foreground as a subtle marker of the growing influence of American culture in Australia.

Interestingly, around the same time, his apprentice Freda Robertshaw painted a distinct version of the beach scene with women and girls as the central focus of the work *Australian Beach Scene* (c1940) (figure 14).[128] In her portrait, the physical female form and motherhood are celebrated offering a more familial view of the beach scene. There is, however, an underlying story of the absence or loss of men due to war, notably the call for young Australian men to contribute to the British war effort in Europe during the Second World War. This is evidenced in the foreground with the representation of a mother and baby, evoking *The Pieta*, the sadness of maternal loss.[129] A woman clothed and seated in the centre of the frame surrounded by children also signifies the fecundity of human life. A male carrying a child on his back is also seen in this image but on the periphery which could be seen as symbolising young men going off to war but life still continues at home.

While Zahalka looks to the original composition of figures, gestures and symbols of Australian beach culture in recreating an evocative image of national identity, she places her two portraits into a contemporary frame. First, she chooses subjects that more accurately reflect the ethnic make-up of contemporary Australian society in 1989.[130] "Less British and more European with Italians and Greeks and also Japanese. I ended up just inviting different groups of peoples and trying to give a sense of the diversity of Bondi and the different communities that lived there".[131] She invited real people from Bondi to participate—surfers,

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[128] Currently on loan to the Art Gallery of New South Wales.
[129] *Portrait 50*, (2015), 31.
[130] At the 1986 Census, European born migrants and settlers (UK/Eire 7.2%, Italy 1.7%, Greece 0.9%, Yugoslavia 1.0%, Germany 0.7, other 1.4%) represented 20% of the total population of over 15 million. The Asian population began to increase during the late 1970s representing 3.4% of the population as the European migration declined in 1986. *Census Year Book* (1986), Australian Bureau of Statistics.
[131] Interview with the artist, Appendix Eleven, 387.

lifesavers, council workers and families. Second, instead of the more muted palette seen in Meere's and Robertshaw's paintings, Zahalka recreates the scenes reminiscent of the famous Bondi Beach with its colours of brilliant yellow sand, luminous blue water and blue sky. A key to these works is the observation that they were not composed on the beach but staged in her studio at the back of the Bondi Pavilion against a painted backdrop, with imported sand, furniture and beach paraphernalia.[132] This would be immediately obvious to the viewer, as the edges of the scene are clearly visible in the earlier of the two photographs. Third, she replaces the old with the new—her beach goers have modern colourful swimwear, towels, a deck chair, beach ball, bucket and spade, and the large li-lo mat is substituted for a smaller 'boogie' surfboard. Furthermore, in what could be regarded as an everyday happy beach scene, oddly none of the people are smiling or engaging directly with each other. Unlike Meere's painting, one women is seen about to hit a beach ball to people outside of the picture frame in Zahalka's photographs. A noticeable absence in these two works are lifeguards with their ever present red and yellow caps.

Figure 15: Anne Zahalka, *The Bathers*, 1989

Figure 16: Anne Zahalka, *The New Bathers*, 2012

[132] Daniel Palmer, 'The Art of Self Display: on Anne Zahalka's Portraiture', in *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987–2007* (Melbourne: Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2007), 5.

Zahalka created *The New Bathers* in response to a request by Edmund Capon to participate in a documentary about Australian art called 'The Art of Australia'. She says:

> I didn't want to do the same, I wanted to reinterpret the image and update it. I worked with another backdrop that had been produced for an outdoor event down at Bondi where we had people coming and standing in front of it and being photographed as part of the festival. We then placed it back into the same pavilion space as before and invited new people to occupy that space.[133]

The updated work is a reflection of both Meere's painting and that of Fred Robertshaw. There are some notable additions to the 2012 portrait—the Australian flag, a unifying symbol of a multicultural nation, and a cricket bat, a symbol of Australia as a sporting nation. What is also apparent is the inclusion of a woman reading seated in a canvas Director's chair wearing a modern version of traditional Muslim clothing, the burkini.[134] In Eastern cultures, the veil and head scarf embody an historical ideal of respect and belonging to the Muslim faith. The presence and representation of Islamic women behind a veil, however, remains a contention in modern Western cultures as it can be considered an artifact of women's oppression. It may also highlight the exclusion of belonging in which a dominant culture seeks to repress cultural difference. I contend the current debate in the media about Islamic veiling is less about religion and more about fear or perhaps curiosity of a lesser known culture and traditional dress in which women hide their identity and right to choose that is no longer a feature of Western societies. Contemporary artists like Zahalka seek to counter such views by representing proud, confident Muslim women wearing traditional clothing in her photographs.

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[133] Interview with the artist, Appendix Eleven, 387.

[134] At the 2011 Census, overseas born migrants and settlers represented 26% of the population of over 22 million. Asian and Middle-Eastern born migration increased from 24% in 2001 to 33% in 2011 and European migration declined from 52% to 40% over the same period. *Reflecting a Nation: stories from the 2011 Census* (2012-13), Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Figure 17: Anne Zahalka, *The Girls #2 Cronulla Beach,* 2007

This can be seen in her photographic portrait *The Girls #2 Cronulla Beach* (2007) (figure 17) which further questions the dominant construct of Anglo-Celtic culture as Australia's national identity. The photograph offers a different perspective of our beach culture. In these images Zahalka emphasises the underlying angst about acceptance of different cultures and religious faiths. Figure 17 shows three Muslim women paradoxically as lifeguards standing proud and strong in an almost masculine pose on Cronulla Beach, each wearing a brightly coloured 'burqini' as a modern symbol of their faith and gender, inscribed with motifs and Arabic lettering.[135] (The burkini of the woman in the middle displays the brandname of Aheda Zanetti *ahilda* in Arabic.) This photograph is staged on Cronulla Beach with beachgoers visible in the surf behind the women and not set against an artificial backdrop. Zahalka made the work in response to interracial tensions and clashes between young people of Anglo-Celtic background and those of Lebanese and Middle Eastern descent in Sydney about beach access and ownership that culminated in the December 2005 Cronulla riots. Indigenous artist Fiona Foley also makes reference to the interracial tensions in multicultural Australia and the marginalisation of Aboriginal people in society in her photographic series titled *Nulla* (2009) about the Cronulla riots. Her photographs portray people from different cultures,

[135] The 'Burkini' was created by Australian woman Aheda Zanetti in Sydney the early 2000s. Zanetti refined the burkini for women life guards in 2007, as shown in figure 17. www.canberratimes, forum 5, 20 August 2016.

including Aboriginal and Muslim, on the sands at Cronulla beach dressed in a cultural mix of contemporary and traditional clothing. While the beach has long held a privileged place in the Australian psyche, Zahalka shows that Dupain's iconic photographs of beach culture are now a relic of past ideals of nationhood and different to present day reality, especially after Cronulla.

Reclaiming the past in the present

While Australian art has long benefitted from the presence of migrant artists, a modern take on cross-cultural identity has emerged in contemporary portraiture. Some migrant artists may seek to reclaim their past by drawing on traditional medium, techniques and iconography from their cultural heritage, others may choose not to define their art practice in terms of their ethnicity and rather seek to transcend cultural borders using alternate modes of representation.

In their unconventional painted and sculpted figurative works, Chinese–Australian artists Guan Wei and Ah Xian reconnect with the richness of their cultural past as a means of overcoming feelings of emotional displacement associated with the present living in their adopted homeland. Guan Wei uses a curious incongruity of Chinese fables, calligraphy and modern symbolism to portray two worlds—China and Australia, similarly Ah Xian uses traditional Chinese methods and iconography in his modern sculptures to illustrate the tensions between Eastern and Western cultures. Even so, Guan Wei contests established Western traditions of portraiture. Whereas Ah Xian infuses the classical portraiture tradition of the bust, which dates back to ancient Roman times, with Eastern decorative iconography and methods that was practiced for millennia in China, thereby extending the medium of the bust in a contemporary way. Both of Chinese descent, Guan Wei and Ah Xian migrated to Australia in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989.

As an introduction, Guan Wei's painted fabled floating worlds and whimsical portrayals of the Australian vernacular express a duality of the magical and banal. He focusses on the quotidian particularity of Australian culture as a

marked contrast to that of his Chinese past. He blends modern Western and traditional Eastern visual elements and storytelling into his contemporary surreal vignettes, says Claire Roberts.[136] Unlike Zahalka, he is not contesting long-held notions of Australian cultural identity but his particular blend of surrealism offers a unique perspective on Australian identity. On the surface, his paintings appear as a light-hearted narrative about Australian popular culture imbued with wit and irony but they can also have an underlying message about Australian cultural relations and the plight of refugees. His exotic island worlds originate from his earliest stay in Tasmania in 1989 that began his fascination with the vast Southern Land and surrounding oceans which reoccurs continuously in his work.

Figure 18, Guan Wei, *Beach No 5*, 2014

His signature linear style against a flat background is a distorted amalgam of perspective, scale and visual commentary. In his *Beach* series (2011–2014) he conveys Australia as a place of warm sunshine, golden yellow sands, clear blue waters and fluffy white floating clouds along with strange inhabitants and rituals. The voluptuous humanoids play with balls on the sand, float in the water in rubber rings, and above all these big round pink bodies sunbake on brightly coloured towels in the hot sun or sit under beach umbrellas relaxing with their

[136] Claire Roberts, *Other Histories: Guan Wei's Fable for a Contemporary World* (Sydney: Wild Peony, 2008), 15-16

family, as shown in the three panel painting, *Beach No.5* (2014) (figure 18). Large boats, beach umbrellas and even larger bodies, birds and dogs occupy the landscape that resembles the Australian continent. Wei adds to the mix symbols of his cultural heritage in the form of red Chinese tablets with motifs and a large fan with traditional Chinese iconography as a cross-cultural narrative about values and identity. The colourful, visual vocabulary in his portrayals offers the viewer a glimpse into his life journey.

For some contemporary artists, ancient art traditions of their cultural heritage may be regarded as a burden of narrow essentialism, not so for Ah Xian, whose use of ancient Chinese traditions and patterns is regarded as the strength of his contemporary sculpture.[137] Ah Xian began using the materials of porcelain, lacquer and cloisonné glaze, elaborately inlaid with jade and ox-bone before turning to bronze and concrete in his experimentation with alternative materials in executing his contemporary sculptures. The smooth surfaces of the porcelain, copper and concrete figures contrast with the overlaying designs and low relief carving of traditional patterns. His sculptural figurative forms and painted surfaces with intricate designs can be seen as resembling tattoos on the human body. Idiosyncratic in its individuality of the representation of the human face and figure, his work captivates the viewer with its beauty and strangeness.

Importantly for his craft, Ah Xian returned to China in 1999 to work with Chinese artisans in the town of Jingdezhen in the Jiangxi province, where he learned how to make porcelain figures from life based on age-old methods of craftsmanship. Jingdezhen is the historic centre of China's fine porcelain production from the early Ming through the Qing period that uses traditional designs of Imperial dragons, lotus flowers, peony scrolls and so forth, as well as idealised Chinese landscapes. Ah Xian continues to work with local craftsmen of the Jingdezhen porcelain studio-kilns to create and decorate his busts and full size figures.[138]

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[137] Ah Xian is a widely respected practitioner of modern sculpture in Australia and internationally, having held several major exhibitions in recent years, namely *China China* (1999–2004), *Human Human* (2000–2001), *Metaphysical* (2007), *Concrete Forest* (2008–2009) and *Evolutionaura* (2011–2013).

[138] Mabel Lee, "Ah Xian: Challenging the Spatial Limitations of Sculptural Art," *Humanities Australia* (2014): 52.

The use of traditional methods is aided by modern materials and digital imaging to create these portraits. His casts are made from life with many of the earlier subjects including himself, his family and friends. Later, he enlisted local people around the Jingdezhen kilns to model for the casts of human figures with each sculpture being unique. Even so, he does not usually identify the person but instead chooses to allocate numbers to his series of portrait sculptures of ordinary people. Ah Xian explains "My idea is to make portraiture statues the other ways around [not of famous people but] to make statues of ordinary people, in a trend of de-deifying, respecting, appreciating and trying to preserves them forever, yet to be reminded that they are not someone special".[139]

Figure 19: Ah Xian, *Human Human-Lotus, Cloisonné Figure 1*, 2000–2001
Figure 20: Tabaimo, *Hanabi-Ra*, 2003

The life-size sculpture *Human Human-Lotus, Cloisonné Figure 1* (2000–2001) (figure 19) is a significant figurative sculpture in his oeuvre. The repetitive title *Human Human* represents a dualism of East and West, traditional and contemporary, serene and restlessness, fragility and strength, as the artist tries to reconcile the tensions between his past and present cultural identity. For this

[139] Kathryn Wells, "Ah Xian, Ancient Crafts, Contemporary Practice–a New Language of Art," *Craft Australia* (September 2011), www.craftaustralia.org.au 3 May 2013.

sculpture, a life cast of a woman was made of hand-beaten copper with finely enamelled pale cloisonné glaze using strands of wire and decorated in a lotus flower plants of green and violet as a delicate motif from head to foot. In China, the lotus is associated with Buddhism and Taoism that represents moral purity and spiritual awakening. The impassive faces with closed eyes and mouths also imbue a Buddha-like quality, calm and meditative endowing it with an air of serenity or even transcendence that represents the human form on a spiritual and psychological level. It is worth noting on a more practical level that during the process of casting the sitter's eyes and mouth must remain shut to protect against the plaster. Other sculptures of women in this series are seen walking, sitting with crossed feet, kneeling or reclining on the floor.

I contrast his work (figure 19) with the video animation *hanabri-Ra* (2003) (figure 20) which is a simple poetic portrait of death—the disintegration and regeneration of Japanese cultural identity in modern day society by contemporary Japanese artist Tabaimo (Tabata Ayako). Besides this difference, there are many similarities between the approaches taken by these two artists. Lesser known to Australian audiences Tabaimo, like Ah Xian has been influenced by aspects of traditional design and iconography which she incorporates into her contemporary art practice.

Tabaimo is also inspired by traditional eighteenth century *ukiyo-e* prints, as well as twentieth century *anime* and *manga* animation. To create her art forms she first draws the images by hand using pen and then uses digital imagery to create the animation. This can be seen in her animated sequences of visual imagery and sound in theatrical stage-like settings. She lures audiences into her surreal worlds that unfold around them with surprising results. Underneath the layers of repetition and unsettling imagery, she reveals hidden truths about the fabric of everyday life in Japan with its politeness and seeming orderliness in her animated videos.[140]

[140] The Art Gallery of New South Wales acquired and exhibited the work *Hanabri-Ra* in 2014. The Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney also presented a suite of video installations and drawings in a sole exhibition of Tabaimo's work in 2014.

Her work *Hanabri-Ra* is an animated single screen installation projected onto a wall in a darkened room that shows a man standing with his back to the audience, his naked body is covered in floral patterning akin to body tattoos. Flower petals lay on the ground around him. His head is either not visible or has been omitted to de-personalised the image. Tabaimo has appropriated the floral image direct from a print by *ukiyo-e* artist Katsushika Hokusai *Chrysanthemums and Horsefly* (an untitled series of works known generally as *Large Flowers* c1822-34). Although *Hanabri-ra* means flower petal, for Tabaimo the falling flower petals represent burning embers of fire symbolising the decay of Japanese traditional culture. The allure of the video installation begins with black crows (Japanese symbol of rebirth or rejuvenation) flying over and through the man's body. A horsefly (symbol of fertility) moves from petal to petal pollinating the flowers, a fish carp (symbol of masculinity) moves in and out of the floral display some of which float to the ground. Then amazingly the body begins to fall apart, limb by limb, petal by petal, and flower by flower to reveal that the man is a simulation, a hyperreal portrayal of the death of Japanese cultural traditions and its renewal as a modern nation.

Figure 21: Ah Xian, *China China-Bust 3,* 1999
Figure 22: Ah Xian, *Human – Carved Lacquer Bust 1, Dragon*, 2000-2001

Political overtones about what it means to live in China following the Cultural Revolution are also evident in Ah Xian's bust sculptures. This is apparent in his first major series of porcelain busts *China China* (1999–2004), as a reminder of

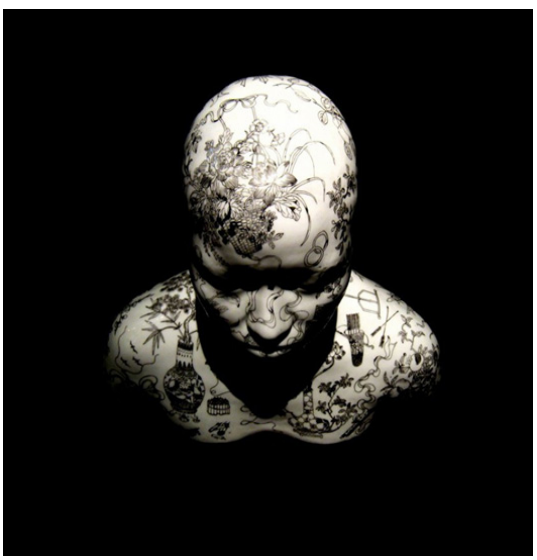
the struggles for freedom of artistic and literary expression in China. In doing so, he sought designs from traditional Chinese pattern books of objects from the Imperial Courts: flowers, birds, antique fans, cabinets, lanterns and vases. An example is the delicate flowers, butterflies and motifs of seasons that decorate the face and body of the work *China China-Bust 3* (1999) (figure 21) which are both striking and disturbing. On one hand, the design symbolises love, beauty and joy, on the other hand, it expresses political and personal containment. The latter is represented by an orange butterfly which veils the woman's eyes, its antennae articulates her eyebrows and a rambling yellow rose covers her mouth, hushing her voice.

From this work, the significance of Ah Xian's desire to liberate the human spirit and body from political control in China as an expression of his cultural identity is visible. This becomes further evident in other works of the *Human Human* series, such as the dramatic work *Human Human-Carved Lacquer Bust 1, Dragon* (2000–01) (figure 22), with its red lacquer and intricately carved reliefs of fierce dragon designs and scales. In Chinese cosmology, the dragon is a symbol of vigour and regeneration, however, in this work the surface design seems to engulf the sculptural form of the human suggesting political constraints on personal freedoms of living in China. Art historian Claire Roberts reinforces this view by proposing overlays of the Imperial dragon (a symbol of the emperor, male, yang) in Ah Xian's works create a claustrophobic, even frightening image of psychological containment and entrapment. As shown on this and other busts, motifs are placed in front of the eyes and mouth, encircle the head and spiritual being. Roberts aptly concludes, "The painted body casts unsettle the viewer by thrusting strong symbols of the past into the present, as if the human being is inescapably branded with his or her ancestry".[141]

In keeping with his commentary on modern day China, his award-winning work *Concrete Forest* (2009) (figure 23) consists of thirty-six human busts made of concrete and overlaid with fragile organic patterns of leaves and flowers of different plant species that engulf the sculpture. Reminiscent of the famous

[141] Claire Roberts, "Fishes and Dragons: Ah Xian's *China China* series," *Art Asia-Pacific*, no. 26 (2000): 55–56.

Chinese soldier and horse funerary statues (210-209 BCE) made of common terracotta material, Ah Xian made his contemporary busts in concrete. Concrete is synonymous with construction and with it the encroachment of urban and industrial developments on the landscape. By experimenting with concrete rather than using porcelain, bronze and cloisonné, this work suggests the fracturing of everyday life in high-density urban areas of China today.



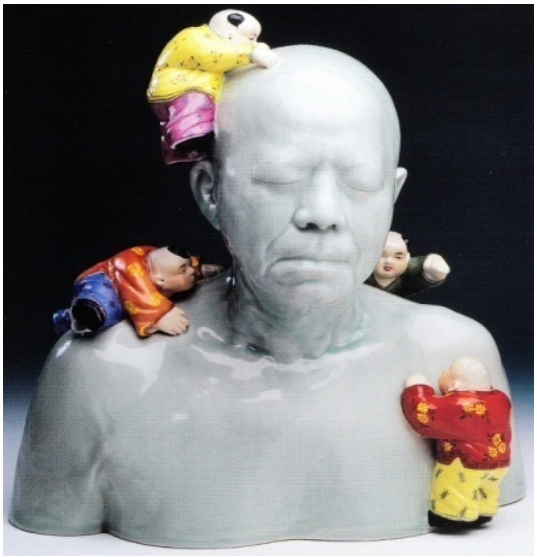


Figure 23: Ah Xian, *Concrete Forest*, 2009
Figure 24: Ah Xian, *Dr John Yu,* 2004

Although Ah Xian does not usually identify the person in his figurative sculptures, a notable exception is his sculptural portrayal of eminent Sydney paediatrician John Yu *Dr John Yu* (2004) (figure 24) that reveals much of the subject through symbolism of life and harmony. The portrait is a metaphor of how the subject is perceived and represented both culturally and socially. Although the porcelain bust cast renders a physical likeness of the sitter, it is what is known about the subject, his Chinese heritage and interest in children's health which is crystallised in the portrait.[142] John Yu says of his portrait bust:

[142] Dr John Yu AC, paediatrician and chief administrator of Sydney children's hospital, was Australian of the Year in 1996. He is noted for his collection of Chinese ceramics, especially celadon, art and music. Commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in 2004.

> It is hard to really know what one looks like to others but to see oneself in three dimensions is a pretty rare experience. I like the sense of quiet–me, but more Buddhist than my Christian roots. I like the idea of being shown with children who have been my lifelong concern. Ceramics is my preferred art medium and celadon my favourite glaze. Ah Xian's portrait really captures how I would like to be remembered.[143]

The sculpture is made of cloisonné enamel and celadon glaze and decorated with miniature figures of children, dressed in colourful traditional Chinese clothes. The decoration on the bust is informed by the Chinese tradition of children ('Tong-Zi') clambering over the laughing Buddha and indicates great prosperity and happiness, with the hope these values are bestowed on the person. The subject depicted with his eyes closed in a moment of contemplation expresses his humility and humbleness that is in contrast to the many children climbing over him. Michael Desmond remarks, "the portrait is a metaphor for life and its harmony emerges from the viewer's reconciliation of these seeming opposites", between youth and age, life and death.[144] The portrait imbues a dignified presence of the man highly regarded by society for his work with children and avoids connotations with death masks. The portrait was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in 2002.

Indigenous portraits of people and country

The broad cultural understanding of Australian Indigenous art today is framed by the omnipresent large-scale contemporary paintings created in remote and regional communities, and to a lesser degree bark paintings, pottery, textiles and photography. This public consciousness does not allow for an in-depth appreciation of contemporary Indigenous portraiture, however, this is changing with a greater recognition of portrait works by Indigenous photographers, urban-based practitioners and artists working across cultural divides.

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[143] Simon Elliot, "Clay, Water, Fire", *Portrait 15* (2005): 24.
[144] www.portrait.gov.au/ahxian.

In this last part of the chapter, I explore contemporary Indigenous photographic portraits, and portraits of country as an alternate concept of subjectivity to that of the individual as an expression of cultural identity.

By the mid-late twentieth-century, Indigenous photographers were playing a more central role in contemporary photography that "differed dramatically in both style and content from the critical use of the documentary tradition that had occurred slightly earlier".[145] Some Indigenous photographers were expressing their connection to country, while others were creating their own form of contemporary photography irrespective of their aboriginality. Notably, it was photographer Mervyn Bishop who captured Aboriginal people and political events from an Aboriginal perspective in the 1960s and 1970s. He was a prolific photographer, first recording events as a press photographer for the Fairfax media and then the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Bishop, however, did more than simply record the world around him, he would tell stories and provide glimpses into the daily lives of Aboriginal people in an engaging and compassionate way that still resonates today. His most celebrated photograph is of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pouring red earth into one hand of Gurindji leader Vincent Lingiari, in the other hand held the land title deeds, both seen standing under a bright blue sky and hot sun. This photograph encapsulates a significant moment in Aboriginal history to mark the return of Gurindji traditional lands in the aftermath of the Aboriginal worker's strike at Wave Hill in 1975. His photography was a catalyst for change in the way non-Aboriginal people saw the living conditions and struggles for equality of Aboriginal people, thereby reversing long held stereotypes of Aboriginality seen in the popular media.[146] Even so it was not until the 1980s that "it became possible to speak of Aboriginal photographers and Aboriginal photography", argues Helen Ennis.[147] She explains this was due to the emergence of a group of talented and committed practitioners who took up the struggle for black rights, self-determination and land rights which was the central focus of their art practice.

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[145] Grishin, *Australian Art: A History*, 467.
[146] Caruana, *Aboriginal Art*, 202.
[147] Ennis, *Photography and Australia*, 42.

This was evident in the landmark *NADOC '86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photographers* that changed the landscape of Indigenous photography. It featured some of the leading photo-artists of the day, including Mervyn Bishop, Tracey Moffatt, Brenda L Croft and the late Michael Riley. In doing so, photography became an important tool for Aboriginal artists through which to express their personhood and cultural identity, as well as to bring attention to social and political issues of the moment. Although Bishop captivated the lives of Aboriginal people twenty year earlier, Jonathan Jones highlights the exhibition was a catalyst for seeing black faces in photographs that were not anthropological, kitsch or negative news and media stories.[148] While photography became the medium for their personal and political commentary on the place of Indigenous peoples in modern Australian society, "key works undercut various racist stereotypes with unique wit, poignancy and intelligence based on an intuitive understanding of histories of representation", writes French and Palmer.[149] As a result, their work led to urban Indigenous photographers playing a greater role in expressing their Aboriginality and cultural identity in a contemporary way using historical references.

I note the recent research by Jane Lydon who argues largely forgotten historical photographs of Aboriginal people held in family collections and public archives offer a rich source of history about the lives of past generations of Aboriginals previously unheard. She examines archival images from the nineteenth century and argues interpretation of these archival images in the present comes with new meanings in the hands of Aboriginal people who seek to overturn de-humanising images of Aboriginals in ethnographic accounts and counter past injustices of colonial history. Despite an archive of historical dispossession and past injustices, Lydon emphasises Aboriginal people were able to adopt the medium of photography for their own purposes and disclose a more realistic and personal narrative of Aboriginal life using cheap Kodak cameras by the mid twentieth century. While Mervyn Bishop and the Boomalli Aboriginal Artist Co-operative in Sydney were at the heart of the contemporary movement that

[148] Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones, *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008), 9.
[149] Ibid, French and Palmer, 8.

enabled Indigenous photo-artists to present their work on their own terms, Lydon's research highlights photography was not a new medium for Aboriginal people who used it as a socio-political tool much earlier, although it was not broadly recognised by society at the time.[150]

Riley, Croft, Moffatt, as well as Hetti Perkins and Fiona Foley were among the founding members of Boomalli in 1987. These artists aimed to illustrate the complexity and diversity of Indigenous culture and artistic expression in urban Aboriginal art. Luke Taylor explains:

> While many artists drew on their early personal and local histories to create their art, it was a clear curatorial theme that the personal experience of issues such as racism and land rights provided points of connection with the experience of indigenous artists around the country and with artists in other countries. The activism at Boomalli was replicated nationally …[151]

By way of example, Riley rejected the ethnographic image of Aboriginal people portrayed in mass media by showing a more sophisticated and glamorous side of urban Aboriginal people in Sydney, as well as documenting the living faces of the Moree Aboriginal community in his photographic portraits.[152] The autobiographical photographs by Croft served to present a more realistic but positive portrayal of contemporary Aboriginal lived experience.

Alternatively, photographers Fiona Foley, Destiny Deacon and Darren Siwes are profoundly political in their views, actively commenting on prejudice and social inequities in the treatment of Aboriginal people past and present in their work. They seek to unsettle prevailing assumptions about the place of Aboriginal people in society, whereas Ricky Maynard documents the struggle of Aboriginal people for self-determination and land rights through the close-up faces of his subjects seen with gritty realism. Photography and activism remains a key focus

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[150] Jane Lydon, 'Transmuting Australian Aboriginal Photographs', *World Art*, Vol 6:1, Apr 2016, p 45–60; 'Aboriginal Transformations of the Photographic Archive', in *Indigenous Archives: the Making and Unmaking of Aboriginal Art*, edited by Darren Jorgensen and Ian Mclean (Crawley: University of Western Australia), 2017, p 364–382.
[151] Taylor, 1999, 8.
[152] Amanda Rowell, "Sophisticated and Glamorous," *Portrait 47* (2014): 25.

of contemporary Indigenous art that is saturated with political statements and satire railing against injustices and the marginalisation of Indigenous people. Important for this thesis, Hetti Perkins affirms portraiture as "a key conduit for the re-imaging of colonial visions of Indigeneity" with artists "challenging the viewer to see past the stereotypes imposed upon Aboriginal people ..."[153]

In what follows, I explore the unconventional photographic portraits by Foley, Deacon, Siwes and Maynard as expressions of personal and cultural identity.

Fiona Foley's portraits and other photographic and installation works have dark undercurrents that bear witness to the colonial past and present context of injustices experienced by Indigenous Australians. A key to making sense of her work is that she frequently places herself within the pictorial frame which suggests a highly personal narrative intersected with historical accounts. She explores her sense of self and cultural identity through her ancestors from the Wondunna clan of the Badtjala nation in a modern context. This is evident in her foremost photographic series *Native Blood* (1994) in which Foley wears both traditional and modern clothing: a grass skirt with platform shoes in Aboriginal colours of red, yellow and black. In one particular portrait taken by photographer Greg Weight, Foley looks to the past when recasting a nineteenth century archival image of an unnamed relative in her own image in *Badtjala Woman 2* (1994) (figure 25). Ennis highlights "this tender homage to a family member is also a political act, signified by Foley's knowing 'possession' and subversion of anthropological and ethnographic codes of representation".[154] By using her own likeness, seen here bare-breasted wearing traditional beads and reminiscent of past photographs in which Aboriginal women were dehumanised as sexual objects, Foley reclaims some of the dignity and pride of her ancestor in a contemporary self-portrait bridging past and present. In effect, she questions colonial ways of making curiosities of native people and situating them as passive objects of anthropologic and ethnographic study.

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[153] Hetti Perkins, *Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004), 16.
[154] Ennis, *Photography and Australia*, 45.

At the same time, Aboriginal people were subject to the camera's inscrutable gaze in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Archival photographs presented images of Aboriginal people as 'primitive' from another place and time, no matter how artfully composed by the photographer.[155] In this way, photography became a crucial medium in shaping a visual cultural history that served to entrench Aboriginal otherness in the minds of Western audiences. Foley and her contemporaries have shifted the narrative from viewing Aboriginal people as the 'noble savage' of a dying race or objects of pity and despair to seeing themselves as a proud people in the face of past and present injustices. These artists have set out to breach that gap in their contemporary art and portraiture.

Figure 25: Greg Weight, *Badtjala Woman 2*, 1994
Figure 26: Fiona Foley, *HHH#1, No Shades of White*, 2004

In a later work *HHH#1, No Shades of White* (2004) (figure 26), Foley makes a subversive statement on race relations in Australia with her take on the American KKK, the Ku Klux Klan, in her contemporary portrayal. The installation HHH (*Hedonistic Honky Haters*) is a racial inversion of the glorification of the infamous white robed and conical hooded vigilante group that terrorised black communities in the American 'Deep South' under the cover of anonymity in the

[155] The term 'primitive' referred to people living in tribal or traditional societies, being the earliest forms of simple human existence.

twentieth century.[156] In this portrayal Foley challenges the acceptance of 'racial hatred' of a past regime against black people today. She portrays it as a powerful force of derogation and violence but in an ironic way by clothing Aboriginal people in colourful robes of Indigenous designs and pointed black hoods. 'Honky' is American slang for 'white' people. According to Foley, the HHH was a secret society founded in America in 1965. As part of her artistic ruse, Foley claims to have photographed seven members of the HHH during her residency in New York in the early 2000s.[157] She explains:

> I've worked with Seminole people in Tampa Florida and African American individuals in New York City where we inverted the race hate group the KKK into a direct ideological flip to become the HHH (Hedonistic Honkey Haters) and subverted the colour white to black in African Dutch wax textiles. All invited to wear the garments, which were made to measure by an amazing seamstress who lived in Harlem, were African American.[158]

These two works were part of a major survey exhibition *Fiona Foley: Forbidden* (2009–10) of her diverse art practice that traversed portraiture, photography, sculpture and installations.[159] Other works in this exhibition portrayed how Aboriginal women have been dehumanised as sexual objects through a British-colonial lens. The exhibition traced her politicised works on female sexuality, race relations and the historical treatment of Aboriginal people, as well as more poetic personal reflections of her cultural identity.

At the same time, 'Blak' dolls are a recurring theme in the contemporary photographic portraits by Destiny Deacon, as a not so subtle form of socio-political activism and satire. She adapted the word black to 'Blak' proudly

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[156] The secret fraternity of the KKK was founded in 1865 in America protesting against the elevated rights of African-American people. There was a brief revival in the 1910s but the KKK has become synonymous with its racial vilification of the black Civil Rights Movement in America during the 1950s-60s.
[157] www.mca.com.au/fionafoley.
[158] Djon Mundine OAM, "Fiona Foley: Woman on the Dunes", *Artlink* 35:2, 2015, 27.
[159] The exhibition was staged jointly at The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane from 19 February to 2 May 2010 and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney from 12 November 2009 to 31 January 2010.

identifying herself as a modern Aboriginal woman.[160] The dolls first appeared in her art practice in the early 1990s as statements against the racial treatment and oppression of Aboriginal people, especially women. It could be said that these dolls are silent reminders of her childhood that encapsulate her own lived experience and Aboriginality as a personal narrative. Significantly, dolls are objects of affection in Western society and by showing violence against them is all the more potent and disturbing to the viewer. Natalie King adds, "Instead of imagining a perfect future for young [Aboriginal] girls, these dolls are decapitated, amputated or contorted, thereby becoming animated and expressive characters in Deacon's psychodramas".[161] In the mode of postmodern pastiche, Deacon appropriates Australian kitsch and ordinary domestic objects like these dolls to express a very distinctive feminist political vision of personal and cultural identity. Like Foley, Deacon considers herself as an Aboriginal political artist. Her art practice, in which portraiture is a dominant feature, serves as a form of social commentary and activism against the immoral and unethical treatment of Aboriginal people. Marcia Langton remarks, "Her work serves as a barometer of postcolonial anxiety, as a window of understanding for new generations of Australians turning away from the psychosis of the colonial relationship, but seeking to establish a considered and meaningful grammar of images in an environment full of colonial memories".[162]

Thus, in her carefully staged photographic portraits and constructed installations of theatrics she deliberately aims to unsettle white colonial history, prejudice and racial inequality experienced by Indigenous people today. Deacon avoids high-end digital imaging by favouring simple Polaroid prints which are then

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[160] Deacon is accredited for changing the orthography of the word 'black' to 'blak' removing the letter 'c' in response to the derogatory language against Aboriginal women and girls in 1991. Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones, ed. *Half-light: Portraits from Black Australian* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008), 66.

[161] Natalie King, "Episodes: A Laugh and a Tear in Every Photo", in *Destiny Deacon: Walk and Don't Look Blak* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 19.

[162] Marcia Langton. The Valley of the Dolls: Black Humour in the Art of Destiny Deacon', in *Destiny Deacon: Walk and Don't Look Blak*, (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 74.

scanned, enlarged and printed to create artworks that may appear amateurish but are a rebuke of traditional art photography, says Jonathan Jones.[163]

Figure 27: Destiny Deacon, *Abracadabra/Axed*, 1994–2003
Figure 28: Destiny Deacon, *Last Laughs,* 1995–2004

The informality of the composition combined with everyday objects and simple photographic processes adds an immediacy and emotional element to her work. An example is the menacing axe and decapitated black doll lying on a stained rough timber floor in the work *Abracadabra/Axed* (1994–2003) (figure 27) that alludes to domestic violence against black women, symbolic brutality and prejudice of colonisation against Indigenous people through a history of oppression. Later works recall similar messages of cultural prejudice.

Deacon also uses wit, satire and irony to convey personal stories and political messages about racial and female stereotyping in her art practice. In keeping with this view, Blair French observes:

[163] Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones, *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008), 14.

> Humour often functions as a survival mechanism, a means of keeping fear or trauma at distance. Or equally, it acts as an agent for change, employing hyperbole for example to highlight absurdities or injustices underpinning social convention. The humour running through Destiny Deacon's photography, video and installations operate in both these manners with work accurately described by curator Hetti Perkins as a "brilliant Machiavellian manipulation of racist stereotypes.[164]

This paradox can also be seen in a more lighthearted image, *Last Laughs* (1995–2004) (figure 28) which shows Deacon holding a blak doll dressed in the colours of the Aboriginal flag (black, red and yellow) representing Aboriginal sovereignty as a statement of Indigenous culture. I make clear Deacon places herself in the frame, not as an expression of selfhood but to convey female solidarity. The photograph is a satire on female oppression despite the racial overtones. Three female prostitutes, one of whom could be viewed as non-Indigenous, are having the last laugh against society that condemns and mocks them. The three women are shown dressed in sexually suggestive clothing, wearing shell necklaces and pearls, standing against an old corrugated iron fence in a suburban street or back alley which evokes the stereotype of female sexual availability, a slut or whore, whether blak or white.

In the same spirit, parody and satire are at the core of Darren Siwes' art practice that re-imagines the inequality of colonial Indigenous race relations in a contemporary way. He looks 'back to the future' in his satirical rendition of an Aboriginal Queen of Australia, seen proudly sitting beside her prince consort in *Jingli Kwin* (2013) shown at figure 29. She places her hand reassuringly on his as she confidently demands the audience attention and respect with her regal gaze. While dressed in a white gown with blue sash and regalia, double strand of pearls and diamond tiara befitting of a Queen, her consort is similarly dressed in fine military uniform and insignia. They sit together on a small red antique sofa placed on red carpet (being the colours of the British Empire), as if waiting to be called to address the people or attend a ceremonial event in their honour. Siwes

[164] Blair French and Daniel Palmer, *Twelve Australian Photo Artists* (Sydney: Piper Press, 2009), 43.

satirises the prospect of an Aboriginal Queen, or for that matter, an Indigenous President of an Australian Republic, which for some people could be an unsettling or preposterous notion of sovereignty even today. In this portrait of society, he politicises the racial inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, the colonised and the coloniser, which is inherent in the nation's past and present. This is seen in the whitening of the subject's faces and arms as a stark reminder that 'civilised' Aboriginal people of the past conformed to the cultural traditions, dress and behavior codes of the colonisers.

Figure 29: Darren Siwes, *Jingli Kwin*, 2013

Colonial portrayals of Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century subverted their Aboriginality by adopting modes of dress and traditions associated with European culture. Nevertheless, the subtext of these portraits was the marginalisation of Indigenous people in early colonial society. For example, Augustus Earle's portrayal of *Bungaree*, Matthew Flinders' Aboriginal guide, dressed in a British naval officer uniform is starkly at odds with how early colonial settlers in Sydney perceived Indigenous people as having little worth in society.[165] His appearance could be regarded as an ironic parody of colonial

[165] Joanna Gilmore, "First Encounters", *Portrait* 39 (Canberra; National Portrait Gallery, 2011), 14.

power by honouring Bungaree as an Indigenous leader with symbols of the colonialists.

Siwes identifies the dilemma of straddling two different cultures that many Aboriginal people experienced during colonial times and which remains today. He shows his subjects wearing period costume in urban and rural settings that is reminiscent of past eras which emphasised the dispossession of Aboriginal people and the relinquishing of land, language, dress and culture to the coloniser. His portraits have hidden meanings that confront and invert the colonial premise of sovereignty over Aboriginal land, people and culture.[166] This is also reflected in Siwes' ghosts—images of Aboriginal figures in the landscape that haunt history with their contemporary presence and sense of belonging.

Although political satire and activism are not far from the surface in the portraiture of many contemporary Indigenous artists, Ricky Maynard documents the power of the uninflected image to record the plight of Indigenous Australians. It could be said that his documentary photography is similar to that seen in America during the late 1920s and the 1930s Great Depression that witnessed the poor social conditions of the American people of that time. Such photographs revealed the power of the image in triggering an emotional response in the viewer to the plight of others and their courage in adversity.

Maynard says his photographs are about "leaving proof" and "life in passing and in complicated times".[167] He aspires to use his images to help Aboriginal people in their desire for social recognition and justice through dialogue. His compelling portraits document the hardship, struggles and perseverance of the Aboriginal people as a tribute to their unrelenting spirit.

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[166] Lia McKnight, "Post-hybrid: reimagining the Australian Self", (Perth: John Curtin Gallery, 2015), 3.

[167] A major survey of Ricky Maynard's photographic portraits over more than two decades *Portrait of a Distant Land* was held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 4 June to 23 August 2009.

Figure 30: Ricky Maynard, *Returning to Places That Name Us* (*Arthur, Gladys, Joel, Joe and Bruce)*, 2000

One notable work *Returning to Places That Name Us (Arthur, Gladys, Joel, Joe and Bruce)* (2000) (figure 30) is an intimate portrayal of five Wik elders. These five dramatic close-up full-face black and white portraits, with no background imagery to detract from the people, were inspired by the Wik peoples's hard fought battle for custodianship of their traditional lands at Cape York in Northern Queensland. The Wik people were dispossessed of their land through mining and pastoral leases in the early twentieth century. In 1996, a landmark ruling by the Federal Government decided that native land title and pastoral leases could co-exist allowing for shared use of the land but granted primacy to pastoral rights over the traditional ownership. Despite this, the Wik people continued to fight for custodian ship of their traditional lands. In 2000, a court ruling conferred possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of their traditional lands on the Wik people. Importantly, as the traditional owners, the Wik people have right to manage the land in accordance with their own laws and customs.

Maynard captures this historic event in these five photographic portraits reminding the nation of the spiritual and cultural importance of the land for

Indigenous people. His portraits are more than mere documentation, they illuminate history through the eyes of Aboriginal people and challenge the voices of the dominant non-Indigenous culture through a different perspective. Here the viewer observes the steely-eyed unflinching gaze and determination on their faces, not as victims but as custodians who refuse to relinquish their traditional lands to non-traditional owners.

Figure 31: Ricky Maynard, *Mick Dodson*, 2010

This steely-eye gaze is also evident in the photographic portrait of Aboriginal leader Professor Mick Dodson, AM (2010) (figure 31) in which Maynard conveys a powerful, dignified likeness of the man and his elevated status in the Indigenous community. As Australian of the Year in 2009, successful barrister and activist for social and economic change for Aboriginal people, Dodson is regarded as a pillar of strength for land rights. Maynard places the subject off centre to the right of the fame, his shoulders turn slightly to the left but it is the face of Dodson with his unsmiling, stern expression that engages the viewer, as he directs his unflinching gaze forward. He is shown wearing a black Akubra hat (cropped in the photograph) as a distinguishing feature of his personal image, and that of his brother Pat Dodson, as well as a white shirt and black jacket. The viewer could easily miss the small enameled brooch on his jacket lapel which has the shape and design of an Aboriginal shield showing pride in his Aboriginality. Dodson is a member of the Yawuru people of the southern Kimberly region of

Western Australia. It could be said that the monotone black and white, and the asymmetry of light and dark across his face in the photograph highlights the imbalance in Australian society of the lived experience of Indigenous people. The formal portrait was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in 2010.

These unconventional Indigenous photographers are at the forefront of their medium, presenting to the nation and the world, a contemporary lens of Indigenous identity. "Another vital contribution made by Indigenous photographers is the fashioning of a different conception of time, which brings the past and the present into a dynamic relationship", writes Helen Ennis.[168] This conception of time can be understood as encompassing cultural meaning and the spiritual embodiment of the land. Importantly, this leads to the second area of contemporary Indigenous portraiture for this thesis which is the significance of portraits of country that allows for a more inclusive meaning of what is a portrait.

Country could be viewed simply as Indigenous traditional lands and waters but it has a more holistic cultural and spiritual meaning for indigenous people that is encompassed in the Dreaming. Veneration of the ancestral beings of the Dreaming who created the landscape and sacred sites remains today. In their writings on country, native title and ecology, Jessica Weir and Luke Taylor examine Indigenous people's contemporary thinking about their attachment to country as a way of life. According to Weir country is the locus of all customs, knowledge, species and nature that frames the traditional owners' relationship with the land.[169] In Taylor's account of the Kuninjku people of Western Arnhem Land, he states the "Kuninjku cast this relationship as a spiritual one, as a direct connection with Ancestral creator beings, and this religious outlook shapes the beliefs and values which are the framework for interpreting the meaning of their actions in the world".[170] He concludes country is understood as a spiritual unity of people with the life of a place and not to individuals. Thus, Indigenous

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[168] Ennis, *Photography and Australia*, 43.
[169] Jessica Weir, *Country, Native Title and Ecology* (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2012), 1–6.
[170] Luke Taylor "Connections of Spirit: Kuninjku Attachments to Country", in Jessica Weir's *Country, Native Title and Ecology*, Australian National University E Press (2012): 21.

Australian's spiritual connection with country has cultural meaning beyond that of the individual and is central to contemporary Aboriginal life.

I contend when considered in this way Indigenous portraits of country gives rise to an alternate concept of subjectivity as a marker of cultural identity. And so, the subjectivity that emerges from these portraits is shaped by people's cultural connection to the land rather than the individual by their difference. The sacred iconography and figurative elements in these portraits reveal how humans are intrinsically linked to country, both past and present.

Portraits of country capture stories of the ancestor spirits and kinship groups by incorporating ancient local designs and spiritual meanings of place, often from where the artist resides or originates. By way of example, curator Margo Neale explains the meaning behind the works encountered at the 2017 exhibition *Songlines: Tracking Seven Sisters* at the National Museum of Australia:

> … are portals to place … many were created on country–all were done with country in mind. Place is palpably present in every nerve of this exhibition, where country is the connective tissue, and kinship between people, place and paintings is inseparable.[171]

Anthropologist Howard Morphy in his writings on Aboriginal art also emphasises how art is integral to Aboriginal people's understand of their culture and land. He states:

> Art established a line of connection with the foundation events and enabled people to maintain contact with the spiritual dimension of existence. Art provides a sacred charter to the land and producing art is one of the conditions of existence. It keeps the past alive and maintains its relevance to the present.[172]

Looking at Indigenous portraits in this way, this alternate concept of subjectivity represents a different way of seeing Indigenous art through a lens of cultural difference to that of the Western aesthetic experience. Such concepts central to Indigenous culture have no equivalent in Western understanding. I reiterate,

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[171] Margo Neale "Blue–Sky Dreaming", *Panorama*, *The Canberra Times* on 16 September 2017: 8–9.
[172] Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, 5.

this is not to say that Indigenous artists do not employ mimesis or expressions of human drama in contemporary Indigenous portraits. I would argue a mark of personhood is less distinguishable in Indigenous culture from the spiritual connection to country. Nevertheless, there is opportunity for artists to reflect something of a person or themselves, whether it is a representation of likeness or an expression of their lived experience, or to embrace a cross-cultural frame that is open to different cultural meanings and aesthetic forms.

Like people throughout human history, Australians have been exposed to new social and aesthetic influences resulting from cross-cultural experiences over centuries. For some, this may represent a collision of distinct cultures, and for others may enact some cultural exchange and inspire new forms of creativity despite the contentious aspects of ethnic categorisation. Nevertheless, such encounters with difference have stimulated a cross-cultural aesthetic or visual hybrid of epistemological approaches in art and portraiture.

Arguably, contemporary Aboriginal art has emerged in a context of cross-cultural connectivity that resulted in some disclosure of cultural myths and the adoption of Western art production in Indigenous communities, notably Western and Central Desert art from the 1970s and beyond. What occurred was a significant shift in aesthetics from earlier intricate dot and seed paintings, rhythmic line marking and figurative forms on bark, towards bold colour abstract renderings on large acrylic board and canvas that has enabled stories of the creation myths and poetics of country to be articulated by the contemporary lived experience of the artists themselves. Although these Indigenous artists drew inspiration from new mediums, the aesthetic judgment and cultural expression was their own. Deborah Edwards affirms this by saying "The triumph for contemporary Aboriginal artists in this extraordinary flowering has been in their creative ability to rework traditional principles in new media, different contexts and within the dictates of individual expression while still retaining the authenticity

of cultural knowledge".[173] Hence, the secret–sacred of tradition and innovation is not mutually exclusive in contemporary Indigenous art.

Furthermore, Howard Morphy comments the Yolngu people of North–East Arnhem Land have always produced art but only recently has it been recognised as 'fine art' and no longer viewed as primitive or ethnographic art by the art market. He says "In world art discourse there has recently been a significant shift away from the European canon toward a more encompassing conception of art, enabling very different artistic traditions to be included within the same broad frame".[174] Aboriginal artists may employ traditional motifs, methods and medium from within its ancient dreamtime narrative with that of other cultures that have different time concepts and iconography. In doing so, this shift has led to Aboriginal art being included with non-Aboriginal art in a cross-cultural frame of meaning without denying its cultural significance and spiritual connection to country. He further remarks "Synergies between artistic processes often enable artists to transcend particular cultural contexts and insert their works into different cultural frames without leaving their own culture behind".[175] Whether it is an anthropological perspective or an art historical one, the interaction between the Yolngu and other cultures shaped a contemporary vision of artistic activity and with it country. Like the Western and Central Desert artists, the Yolngu saw it as a means of asserting the value of their cultural history in a contemporary way to align with the global art market.

What is undeniable is the contemporaneity of Indigenous art in continuity with Indigenous traditions and Western art production. Importantly, the flourishing of these new forms of visual expression heralded new ways of seeing Indigenous spiritual connection to country and people's place within it.

For a key to understanding portraits of country, I consider the groundbreaking exhibition *Open Air: Portraits in the Landscape* at the National Portrait Gallery in

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[173] Deborah Edwards, "Histories in the Making: Aboriginal Art and Modernism", in *One Sun One Moon, Aboriginal Art in Australia*, ed., Hetti Perkins (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2007), 51.
[174] Howard Morphy, *Becoming Art: Exploring Cross–Cultural Categories*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008), 2.
[175] Ibid, Morphy, 17.

2008. The Gallery Director approached this exhibition from a more open concept of identity in which Indigenous people's relationships to the land is the distinguishing cipher. The late Andrew Sayers explained his thinking around the theme of portraits of place some seven years earlier:

> National portrait galleries have been traditionally predicated on the idea that identity can be equated with individuality. In Australia, however, we have Indigenous traditions in which identity is actually lodged somewhere else–in relationships and in people's relationships to land. One could do a very interesting exhibition called 'landscape as Portrait' in the Australian context. The idea would be that there is an emphatic relationship to the landscape, which makes landscapes embodiments, signs or projections of identity.[176]

From this point of view, we are able to understand the potential significance of this exhibition that broadens the concept of identity in portraiture from the individual to include country, as a visual expression of Indigenous peoples' spiritual and cultural identity. The exhibition represents a departure from the Gallery's orientation towards the recognition of the individual achievements of notable Australians and significant events in Australian history. That is not to say that the exhibition did not include portraits of people (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in the physical environment as expressions of individual identity or creation stories that incorporate autobiographical references to the artist's life that could be regarded as self-representations. Indeed, according to Morphy "Yolngu art provides consideration space for an individual's life experiences to be reflected in the details of their art".[177] It is clear from his remark portraits of country can also express something of the life of the artist. Here, I have focused on portraits of Indigenous people in the landscape, not non-Indigenous,

Notably, *Open Air* makes reference to the autobiographical qualities of works by the Indigenous Marika family of East Arnhem Land and brothers Tim Leura and

[176] Sayers, *Open Air: Portraits in the Landscape*, 1.
[177] Morphy, *Open Air*, 15.

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri of the Western Desert whose paintings of ancestor spirits and sacred myths are presented within a contemporary context of the lives of the artists. For example, the painting *Trial by Fire* (1975) by Tim Leura is regarded as a portrait of the artist, his life story and relationship to the land positioned within the ancestral story of the Fire Dreaming. As the story goes, a young man of the Tjapaltjarri clan who is being initiated into the ways of bush survival outwits the elders by lighting a bushfire and trapping a kangaroo thought to be the man. In this work, outlines of figures are seen running from the fires shown as bold red circles raging across the land. The fire began at Warlugulong which is further celebrated in a great collaborative work with his brother *Warlugulong* (1976). This story has a different focus and moral about the Old Blue-Tongued Lizard man who lights a fire which engulfs his two sons because they defied their father by eating a sacred kangaroo. While there are no recognisable figures in this painting, the footprints of the brothers and the kangaroo are plainly visible running across the land from the great fire in the centre of the picture frame. In these two works we see the significance of the artists' deep engagement with the land as a marker of cultural identity. I will go so far as to assert that they may also be regarded as self-portraits because they reflect something of the lives of the artists, although there is no discernable visual likeness evident.

In order to explore the concept of portraits of country in the present, I first examine the contemporary portrait of *Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri* (2002) (figure 32) by Tim Johnson as a visual juxtaposition of different cultural traditions (shown at the *Open-Air* exhibition). Like Geoffrey Bardon before him, Johnson developed a close relationship with the artists of Papunya Tula in the late twentieth century, in particular the brothers Tim Leura and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri. This relationship facilitated a different way of seeing Western and Aboriginal iconography that culminated in artworks which transcended two or more cultures. Johnson was also influenced by Eastern iconography and spiritualism that found a place in his eclectic imagination and understanding of different cultures. Importantly for Johnson, as a non-Indigenous person, he was given permission to employ stylised Indigenous motifs and dotting techniques

used by the Papunya Tula artists in his own art practice. In doing so, he was able to articulate visual elements of aesthetic difference and complexity of portraying identity, a cultural connection to country and with it an expression of personhood, in one painting.

In his portrait of Clifford Possum, Johnson makes a connection between Aboriginality, Buddhist spirituality and Western mimesis by placing the subject in the centre of the picture plane within a realm of different imagery and cultural symbols. The subject is observed in white clothes and hat, sitting cross legged and hands cupped as a vision of meditation floating above the landscape in the blue clouds. A likeness of the subject with his broad facial features, long hair, and beard is clearly visible as he looks directly at the viewer. Around him is a shimmering field of circular dots, an aerial map of dreaming trails and camp sites, filled with symbols, persons, fauna and flora painted in yellow, red, blue and green. The symbols and scenes of people sitting in camps with elders and children, artists painting, ceremonies, and all manner of animals and birds relate to the lived experience of the subject. The two arcs and an elongated circle on the left and two crossed spears and spear thrower on the right signify hunting, as shown in traditional Western Desert painting. The artist has placed a figurative likeness and spiritual presence of Clifford Possum in the landscape. From this, it becomes clear that the portrait is a cross-cultural encounter that reveals the different cultural worlds of the artist and the subject. Melinda Hinkson explains:

> No element is privileged over another; it is as if Johnson is aware he is yet to acquire the language, the worldview, through which they might be ordered. It is through the language of paint and Buddhism that he [Johnson] reveals himself visually grasping and rendering Possum … the lenses through which he attempts to know the Other and his awareness of the limits of the knowledge' outside of his grasp.[178]

And so, the work is both a visible likeness of the man, regarded as one of Australia's finest Indigenous artist, and of place that shows his deep spiritual

[178] Melinda Hinkson, "Seeing More than Black and White: Picturing Aboriginality at Australia's National Portrait Gallery," *Australian Humanities Review* 49, (November 2010): 22.

connection to the land and ancestors through the use of symbolic imagery as an expression of his cultural identity.

Figure 33: Tim Johnson, *Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri,* 2002
Figure 33: Tim Johnson, *Daisy and Tim Leura*, 1982

This visual hybridity can also be seen in a second portrait of *Daisy and Tim Leura* (1982) (figure 33), an earlier example of how Johnson juxtaposes Indigenous and Western iconography to express meaning between cultures. In this second painting, Johnson fuses a faint likeness of the subjects, dressed in Western clothing standing rigid in a hot and dusty outback camp site, as a representation of their cultural past and present day reality. Their identity is referenced by the Indigenous fields of dots and motifs in the paintings by Tim Leura, the round one with whom Johnson collaborated on the same canvas, and the vulnerability of Indigenous people living in remote Indigenous communities determined by a dominant culture that is fundamentally different from their own.

Third, I examine the contemporary portrait of *Marcia Langton* (2009) (figure 34) by Brook Andrew in which mimesis and cultural meaning that is inextricably linked to the land are clearly evident. This striking portrait of Langton conveys more than her Aboriginality and her connection to country, it is a powerful statement of the social myth of the person and her political influence as an Indigenous academic and activist on Indigenous policy issues and social equality.

Figure 34: Brook Andrew, *Marcia Langton*, 2009

To achieve this, the artist portrays the subject as the powerful Hindu Goddess 'Kali' of change and destruction seen in a seated pose with multiple arms. Langton herself has a spiritual interest in Buddhism. Andrew grounds her to country, as a spiritual being to his mother's native clan, the Wiradjuri, with the black and white geometric pattern flowing around her like a river of energy. Symbolism plays a crucial role in this portrait. The diamond-sun in hot orange and yellow held aloft by her represents new beginnings and hope which alludes to her advocate work with Aboriginal communities and mining companies. The duality of cultures and humankind is shown by the black and white skulls held in opposite hands. The power and magic of her spiritual being are represented by fire, an important symbol in Hindu mythology, in one hand and meditation in the other. A photographic face of Langton framed by long flowing white hair renders a likeness of the subject. Nevertheless, the portrait is more than a likeness of the person, it is a symbolic representation, a caricature of Langton's wisdom, personal power and her connection to the land.[179] Brook Andrew has used various media to create this work: photographs imported into digital files which were then printed onto individual screens and assembled as a collage on a board.

[179] www.portrait.gov.au/video transcript Marcia Langton, Brook Andrew and Trent Walter (2014).

While visually different, these three portraits make a compelling statement about portraits of country, as visual and spiritual markers of cultural identity. They convey a complex visual language of cultural hybridity by unifying Aboriginal cultural meaning in the land with that of Western expressions of mimesis.

In this thesis, I have taken Andrew Sayer's thinking around identity to put forth an alternate concept of subjectivity in Aboriginal art as portraits of country that give meaning to cultural identity. Here I have shown how contemporary Aboriginal portraits embody a different way of seeing portraiture beyond the depiction of the individual to a dialogue about place that allows for a more inclusive meaning of what is a portrait. I make a distinction that attachment to country may also reflect something of the artists themselves as a visual expression of their lived experience or likeness of the subject in a portrait. In their contemporary visual representations of country, Indigenous artists are re-interpreting the sacred past in the present, developing new perspectives on traditional ways of visual expression using painting, photography, film and video, sculpture and new media, and engaging with opportunities afforded by the global art market.

I conclude identity as a unifying idea of nationhood continues to unfold in Australia reflecting the complexity of our multicultural society and Indigenous heritage. Whether painted in remote Indigenous communities, commissioned by institutions or documented in photographs, contemporary portraiture is continuously transforming the way Australian people see themselves as a culturally and ethnically diverse people and nation. I have shown how the concept of identity, and what it means to be an Australian, is different today from that previously understood in the past by many Australians. Notwithstanding the significance of the land as a visual and spiritual marker of Indigenous cultural identity.

In the next chapter, I extend the discourse on identity to consider portraits of society and social masks. I explore how social portraits provide an insight into a person's socialised self, as well as reveal meaning about social difference and distinction through the face, symbolism and settings.

CHAPTER THREE: PORTRAITS OF SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MASKS

To be fully engaged in a social milieu can require acting out roles that capture the attention of others or convey status. The socialised self can act as a veneer of the personal self that becomes a mask. The mask then becomes inseparable from an individual's perceived identity in the mind of others around truths, untruths and social ideals.

A portrait can both reveal and conceal meanings about social identity. Richard Brilliant affirms this by saying "portraits exist at the interface between art and social life and the pressure to conform to social norms enters into their composition because both the artist and subject are enmeshed in the value system of their society".[180] Art historian Marcia Pointon views "portraiture as a tool that makes possible the registering of identity in relation to the social". Interestingly, she adds "There does not have to be an actual portrait to make this possible" as she is "equally concerned with how powerful the very *idea* of a portrait can be".[181] This is not to say she deflects the importance of mimesis or the depiction of the subject in portraits, rather she looks more to meanings of portraits in society to express identity, status, character and so forth. Pointon further remarks that social identity can be expressed through symbolism and settings in the portrait alongside 'authorised' institutional data which are interpreted by the viewer to compile an understanding of the subject, whether real or illusory. West claims such external signs—behaviour, dress, pose and symbols—have been remarkably consistent in portraiture throughout history. Portraiture has been associated with wealth and status since antiquity.

[180] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 11.
[181] Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity*, 11.

Furthermore, she says "portraits are filled with the external signs of a person's socialized self, what Erving Goffman referred to as the 'front' of an individual".[182] In his well known text *The Presentation of the Self,* Goffman used the theatrical metaphor of a stage performance to describe the socialised self. He contends a person acts out a persona 'front–stage' that has been contrived 'back–stage' which is compatible with a self image the person wants to portray to others.[183] His commentary on the idea that a perception of the self is performed or projected in social situations still applies today.

Goffman was concerned with the social nature of the self in the context of social interactions in every day life. Goffman argues that while people interpret their social behaviour or demeanor through the deference of others, it is more than acting out socialised ritualised behaviours, people create an impression of themselves or give a performance appropriate for a social situation.[184] Such impressions are evoked by internal emotions or motives and expressed through external means by facial expressions, dress, gestures, personal possessions, and status objects to render a self image meaningful and worthy to others. Goffman's all-inclusive term for this is 'body idiom'.[185] At the same time, the portrait artist may create a perception of the socialised self or body idiom in the minds of others with the use of such devices adding special meaning to the subject portrayed. Conversly, the subject may try to contain or distance themselves from what is known socially and project another side of the self to the viewer. Philip Manning refers to this as the 'two selves thesis', an outer mask to manipulate peoples ideas of oneself to appear more authentic to protect against criticism or a reflection of a more cynical inner self.[186] Goffman was primarily concerned with the *presented self* as a product of social encounters about how people behaved towards each other in everyday life and less about a person's character or personality. Nevertheless, his theories have relevance to portraiture.

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[182] West, *Portraiture*, 30.
[183] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 235.
[184] Erving Goffman, "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor," *American Anthropologist*, 58:3, June (1967), 473-502.
[185] Tom Burns, *Erving Goffman* (London: Routledge, 1992), 38.
[186] Philip Manning, *Erving Goffman and Modern Sociology* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 44.

Photography also plays a crucial role in the creation and production of social portraits which leads me to an observation made by curator Judy Annear. She remarks there are two important antecedents to contemporary portrait photography: one that strives to capture a moment of transition or awareness in all its intensity while acknowledging the constructed nature of individual identity, and the other which can only be regarded as fiction.[187] The tension between these two ways of seeing an image whether authentic or manipulated still remains at the heart of portraiture today. Thus, the spectrum of 'reality' in photographic portraiture is with those photographers who are opposed to the constructed composition with fictitious subjectivity and those photographers who are unperturbed by such means in creating the social mask.

In this chapter, I engage with the concepts and ideas put forth by these art historians and theorists. In doing so, I examine what can be revealed or concealed in social portraits, suggesting photographers and artists can do more than construct a veil of truth in social masks of famous people, they can also capture the lives of ordinary citizens in imaging social identity.

The chapter has two parts: first, reframing fame in commissioned and celebrity portraits; and second, social masks and observational portraits. In this context, I focus on the social portraits that form a central theme of their art practice by Jude Rae, David Rosetzky, Nikki Toole and Ingvar Kenne.

Reframing Fame

Portraits in the collections of the national cultural institutions provide an understanding of those people who are considered to have mattered in society in the past and those who do today. One way to achieve this is by commissioning portraits that aim to formally record the contribution famous and notable people make to society whether by their achievements or social standing.[188] The

[187] Judy Annear, "Blank Face,": 279.
[188] The commissioning of portraits for the national collection is regarded as an essential component of the National Portrait Gallery's charter. The Gallery is distinctive in its role which seeks to shape the way portraits are made in the future rather than rely on portrait works that already exist and thus shape the collection. The Gallery actively commissions portraits from a wide spectrum of society.

commissioned formal portrait would generally seek to present a recognisable likeness of the subject within a social context or broader cultural frame for the purpose of commemoration consistent with the conventions of portraiture. To achieve this aim would require commissioning portraits from established and emerging artists whose approaches complement the sensibility of the subjects or have a creative edge.

Jude Rae is a prominent contemporary artist who works across genres, including portraiture.[189] While the primary focus of her art practice has been still-life painting, in 2004 she expanded her oeuvre to include portraits of people and figures in interiors that owed much to her study of the placement of objects. Since then she has broadened her oeuvre with portrait commissions of some of Australia's eminent scholars, scientists and politicians. She has painted formal portraits that commemorate the careers of former Vice–Chancellors Dr Ian Chubb (2011) and Dr Ian Young (2014) of the Australian National University; Vice–Chancellor Professor Glynn Davis (2012) of the University of Melbourne; former Chancellor of Monash University and now Chief Scientist Dr Alan Finkel (2015); the late distinguished virologist Frank Fenner (2007) and the former Speaker of the House of Representatives Anna Burke (2015).

Portrait commissions require a balance between undertaking a dispassionate analysis and capturing a sense of the person. Like other portrait artists, Rae augments photographs of the subject with little drawings of physical features, facial expressions and gestures during the early sittings. She does not overly rely upon photographs because in her view it would make the portrait appear too flat and artificial.

[189] Rae has been twice awarded the Portia Geach Memorial Prize for portraiture in 2005 and 2008, and the Bulgari Award in 2016.

Figure 35, Jude Rae, Dr Ian Chubb, 2011

Figure 36, Jude Rae, Anna Burke, 2015

In the formal conventional portrait of Ian Chubb (figure 35), the grey-brown tonal colours and the ray of light falling across the wall behind him is indicative of her still-life paintings and interiors. The luminosity and roughly textured surface of the background, however, does not distract from the subject but adds an architectural nuance to the work. The portrait is both formal and relaxed as he boldly stands quietly smiling with his right hand in his suit pocket. The placement of the hands and hand gestures are an important focus of her portraits, as a physical expression of the person much like the face—his left hand is visible at the centre of the picture plane. Pride in his career achievements is clearly evident with his black academic robe with gold trim draped over his left arm and the pin of his award as a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in his lapel. His interest in rugby may not be publicly known but is clearly on display with his red and white tie of the Sydney Swans. Rae says, "The tie was a perfect choice by Chubb because it lifted the colour of the painting".[190]

In her account of the process of making a portrait on commission, Rae remarks:

[190] Interview with the artist, Appendix Seven, 366.

> [Portraiture] is thus strongly associated with the mechanisms of social status, power and wealth. In commissioning a work, the client usually requires certain conditions which necessarily limit the artist. This tends to contribute to the idea that the commissioned portrait is creatively constrained … Limits can present extraordinarily exciting creative challenges—ask any architect.[191]

Whilst there may be certain requirements set down by the client, she highlights this does not diminish the creative potential of the artist or the subject. The Parliament House Historical Memorials Committee has rules about the size and composition of official portraits but this did not distract from her portrayal of the former speaker Anna Burke (figure 36). In her formal portrait, Burke is seated in a hand-crafted dark timber chair from the Senate chamber but not the Speaker's Chair, against a textured grey tonal background. She sits calmly, hands crossed in her lap, unsmiling and reflective, eyes looking ahead but not at the viewer.

Burke chose to wear a suit with dramatic patterning which gave her portrait an edge over other formal portraits of subjects seen wearing their dark robes and grey suits on the walls of Parliament House. The fabric was designed from photographs of the Castello in Madrid taken by the husband of the designer Tiffany Trelour. The dark blue and white fabric features the Castello buildings at night with red and white circles representing fairy lights. Rae explains

> At first sight of the fabric pattern, I thought this is going to be too difficult but actually I think it's going to make the painting. The trick for the artist is to recognise that what a person wears can be a gift.[192]

Rae views Burke's choice of dress for her formal portrait as perfect for the occasion. She stresses how a woman is dressed for an official portrait is much more complex than for men who just worry about the colour and pattern of the tie. The outfit cannot be too conservative or outrageous but needs gravitas.

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[191] Jude Rae, "Hired guns, bounty hunters and horse whisperers", *Portrait 52*, National Portrait Gallery (2016): 23.
[192] Ibid, Rae.

The portrait of Anna Burke is significant for two reasons: it is the first portrait Rae has done for the Parliament House collection and second it is a portrait of woman and painted by a woman artist for the collection. In 2018, Rae will make history again with two more commissioned portraits of women: Susan Keifel, the Chief Justice for the High Court collection, and Linda Burney, the first Indigenous woman in the House of representatives. Each of these women were particularly interested in being painted by a woman artist.

While the commissioned portraits by Rae convey a recognisable likeness of the sitters in a conventional way, the commissioned portrait of musician Nick Cave *Nick Cave* (1999) (figure 37) by Howard Arkley is another case in point in style and medium. The portrait was the first commissioned work of the (new) National Portrait Gallery, although not typical of official portraits that are usually associated with a national portrait gallery by the art-going public and art critics. So much so, Arkley's close-up portrait of the face of the musician has become an iconic work of Australian contemporary portraiture of the new millennium. The portrait of Cave celebrates the singer's influence in the rock music scene as an enigmatic and compelling figure—his musical achievements enjoys a cult status. Cave is best known as the lead singer of the bands 'The Boys Next Door', 'The Birthday Party', and 'Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds'.

The portrait depicts an idealised likeness of the musician's face which captures the aura of the rock star with his intense black rimmed eyes and pouting lips that suggests a moodiness. Marc de Jong, however, suggests Cave's face is a theatrical mask that represents the mentality of the wild punk rock era of the 1980s.[193] Cave has a reputation for dark, emotional and unrestrained stage performances. It is painted in Arkley's distinctively airbrush style with psychedelic incandescent colours of purple, blue, red and yellow. This gives a shimmering, hallucinatory presence to the face, perhaps a drug-induced haze. The bold colouration and graphic intensity that frames his face are characteristic of Arkley's painterly style. Arkley has become synonymous with images of Australian suburbia, although his earlier work was associated with the music

[193] Marc de Jong, video clip National Portrait Gallery, 1 July 2014.

sub-cultures of Melbourne inspired by the likes of music by Nick Cave and his bands.[194] The portrait was not painted from life but from Arkley's memory of his association with Cave and the Melbourne music scene from the 1970s onwards.

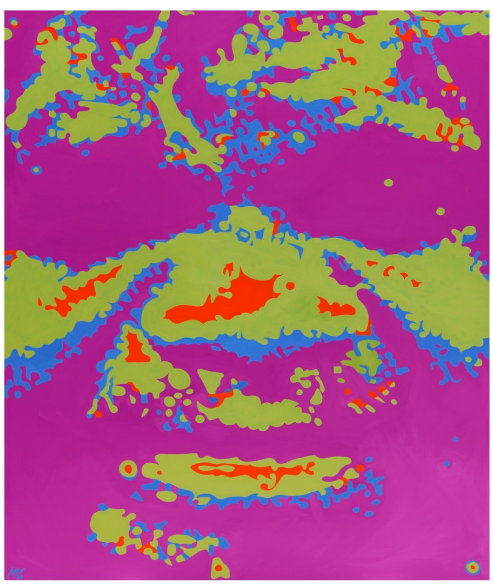
Figure 37: Howard Arkley, *Nick Cave*, 1999
Figure 38: Matthys Gerber, *Cadel Evans,* 2008

Arkley's painting may have given inspiration to other contemporary portrait artists commissioned to paint well-known people in society. I argue Matthys Gerber's large abstract portraits in luminescent colours can be likened to Arkley's incandescent colour palette and simple painterly style. Indeed, Gerber's portraits convey an abstract representation of likeness of the subject using blocks of colour and form. In doing so, he creates a tension between the conventions and modes of expression of portraiture and abstraction. Gerber is known to work across many different genres and styles.[195]

Gerber's portrayal of Australian cycling heroes Cadel Evans, Stuart O'Grady and Robbie McEwen wearing helmets, sunglasses and technicoloured team jerseys are painted in vivid colours, as a reflection of their sporting prowess and social

[194] www.portrait.gov.au/nickcave/christopherchapman.
[195] Gerber's oeuvre has a bewildering eclecticism of subject matter from portraits, large alpine and mountain landscapes, kitsch scenes, and a panoply of visual styles and forms within the traditions of still-lifes, portraiture, landscape and abstraction, as shown in the exhibition of his art work at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in September 2015.

identity. His portrait of Cadel Evans *Cadel Evans* (2008) (figure 38) shows the head and shoulders of the cyclist 'in action' as though riding in a race. The abstract nature of portrait is formed using a multiplicity of coloured shapes in purple, yellow, pink, orange and green on a blue background and yet a likeness of the subject seen in profile is clearly evident to the viewer. Evans is revered as sporting hero in Australia and internationally, he won the great cycling race *Le Tour de France* in 2011, having come second in 2008 and 2007.



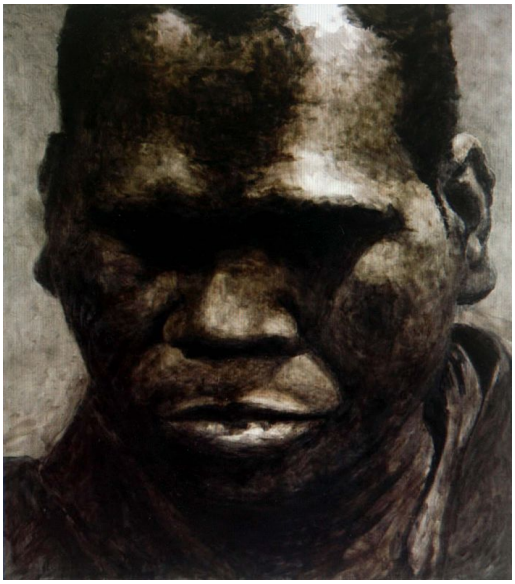


Figure 39: Matthys Gerber, *George Tjungarrayi,* 2002
Figure 40: Guy Maestri, *Gurrumul,* 2009

Another abstract portrait by Gerber with its bold blocks of colour awash in hot purple-pink, clear blue, luminous green and bright orange, however, only gives a hint of the physicality of the face of Indigenous Western Desert artist *George Tjungarrayi* (2002) (figure 39). And yet, the abstract qualities of this large close-up portrait form a likeness of the subject with his broad nose, wide mouth and deep set eyes that celebrate his Aboriginality. The abstract expressionist style of this portrait takes inspiration not from Western abstraction but from the paintings of Tjungarrayi himself and other Indigenous artists of the Western Desert and their cultural connection to country. The contours of his face in this portrait can be likened to the landscape as seen in Tjungarrayi's paintings and likened to a portrait of country. In doing so, Gerber pays homage to the Papunya

Tula artist and his contemporaries as a new generation of Indigenous artists who rose to fame in the international art scene in the mid-late twentieth century.

In keeping with this, I suggest the Archibald winning portrait *Gurrumul* (2009) (figure 40) by artist Guy Maestri painted in tonal brown-grey is a no less powerful image than the luminous coloured portraits of Cave, Evans and Tjungarrayi. The large-scale dramatic portrait of the face of the late Dr G (Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu) foremost recognises the blind Indigenous singer who raised himself above his social and physical disadvantage to become something of a cultural phenomenon in Australia and internationally with his style of music. The stripping back of the colour palette and use of thick febrile paint strokes has resulted in a large and arresting monotone portrait. The artist has deliberately contrasted light and dark on his face, by illuminating light from above and placing his eyes in shadow. As Ashleigh Wadman asserts, "The shadow that defines Gurrumul's eyes acts as the focal point of the painting and offers up a powerful reference to the musician's blindness and intense shyness".[196] The face of quiet meditation also fits with the musician's professional persona that avoids the media spotlight. His songs, most of which is sung in his native Yolngu language, are about his connection to the land, culture and his people of the Gumatj clan of North-East Arnhem Land. Dr G was a member of the famed Aboriginal band Yothu Yindi and the Saltwater Band. In an interview with Wadman in 2011, Guy Maestri explains that he sensed a quiet inner strength in Gurrumul when seeing the musician perform in concert on the eve of New Year 2008. To achieve this, Maestri built up the image on the canvas slowly, glaze upon glaze to capture the 'beautiful quality of his skin' while listening to his music and the lyrics of the songs. The painting of Dr G contrasts with Maestri's early paintings that were large, colourful expressionist works with lots of thick paint trowelled across the surface of the canvas, much like those by fellow artist Ben Quilty.

These commissioned portraits constitute powerful statements about the kind of contemporary portraiture audiences can experience at our national institutions.

[196] Ashleigh Wadman, "Yolngu Boy," *Portrait 41* (2011): 23.

On one level, the Parliament of Australia recognises the ongoing historical and social importance of formal portraiture in conveying its most senior past elected representatives to the nation and its citizens. On another level, the National Portrait Gallery places portraiture at the centre of contemporary art in Australia and in doing so, it brings into play a dialogue about what is a portrait.

Audiences are hardwired to respond to the face in portraits as a measure of individuality, social status, gender and ethnicity. At the same time, people may feel disorientated when faces are hidden or illusory by not conveying a resemblance of the subject in a portrait, especially those of famous or celebrity faces. What audiences see in the faces of musicians Nick Cave and Dr G, cyclist Cadel Evans or for that matter artist George Tjungarrayi may evoke meanings of identity but only hint at likeness and character. Looking at these contemporary portraits in this way, I assert the abstract pictorial representations of the face by these artists can in part be interpreted by the theory of the face by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari that calls for the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of an image. Deterritorialisation refers to the undoing of established power structures in society, medium or symbols of visual culture and replacing them with new structures, beliefs and art styles, that is, a reterritorialisation. In this context, I would argue contemporary portraiture is no longer restrained by established conventions of the Western canon and has become deterritorialised, thereby liberating a multiplicity of visual expressions and media to one of reterritorialisation.

For the purposes of this thesis, I briefly explain Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the face which they called 'Faciality'.[197]

Foremost, they describe the human face as a signifier of humanity, ethnicity and social identity not by its resemblance to a person but as a concept or product of an abstract machine based on simple binary distinctions of black and white. These distinctions form the (white) surface of the face, and the (black) eyes, nose and mouth akin to a lunar landscape of light planes and dark craters. They argue

[197] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 11, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 168–190.

the signification and subjectification of these binaries converge to create a passable or unpassable face from the dominant face of which all interpretations of the human face are made. In Western society, the dominant or 'positive' coherent identity is seen as the European white male face which they refer as the 'Majoritarian' face. Moreover, the prime facial construct of the 'Christ face' in historical Western representation is viewed as the majoritarian face. From this premise, they argue variants of the dominant face are considered 'negative' forms which they refer as the 'Minoritarian' face. Thus, when a minoritarian is facialised, the subject is made visible only against the dominant face and the manner in which the dominant social system allows. In other words, when a person in Western society first comprehends a face, it is by its likeness to or divergence from the majoritarian face—through the binary choices of whether it is male or female gender, white or black skin, European or other race, and so forth. In doing so, the face then becomes both a powerful political and cultural identifier that can convey acceptance or indeed suggest exclusion in society. Indeed, the repressed nature of the minoritarian to the majoritarian identity is nowhere more evident than in gender and race imposed through Western patriarchy. The historical subordination of women through the objective representation of the female face and form is evident in Western art history and visual culture.

Moreover, the landscape of the face as a metaphor for national identity enforces meaning through racial difference in a similar way as the facial system does through divergence from the dominant face. Similarly, the marginalisation of Indigenous people is represented in ethnographic portrayals and mass media. In this regard, the Australian landscape, like the face, was territorialised by the native black face then deterritorialised by white settlement in the eighteenth century establishing the dominant white European male face as the univocal of the majoritarian. By mid-late twentieth century, the strata of Australian society had become polyvocal with Indigenous, ethnic and feminine faces challenging the dominant face and with it the reterritorialisation of the land. Despite this polyvocality, the historical notion of the dominant European white male face of Western society still remains today, although this is diminishing with the growth

of diversified cultural and social expression in mass media and visual culture, including portraiture. This is in line with Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the face, in which they seek to dismantle the current binary system of visual representation and interpretation of the face (identity) considered restrictive in its domination and oppression, in favour of multiplicity.

At the same time, society's obsession with the poetics of the human face and body of famous people and celebrities remains a public one. People gaze voyeuristically at the spectacle of their celebrity worship through snippets of their daily lives, romances, achievements, as well as the scandals as they fall from grace seen in popular media. Today it is no longer enough to be beautiful, famous or notorious but desirable too on social media. Michael Desmond says that the cult of celebrity fills what Jean-Paul Sartre called the "God-shaped hole in our consciousness".[198] In real life, however, ordinary people would not have the opportunity to be close to famous or well-known people. To fill this void, celebrity portraits viewed in gallery settings or online may elicit feelings of intimacy in the viewer who then may experience a connection to the person represented in the image, despite the plurality of the intended message and audience. In the gallery setting, however, celebrity portraits can only seduce their audiences for a limited time, while they remain forever on social media and internet sites for all to see.

American photographer Martin Schoeller is better known for his series of photographic portraits in extreme close-up that exposes the complexities of the human face but reveals little of their personality. Nevertheless, in his portrayals of celebrities, Schoeller reframes our understanding of fame by finding some common ground for looking at people. He does this by consciously recording the minute details of their individual faces and stripping away the socialised self. Desmond explains, "Schoeller uses his close-up technique as a way of levelling differences between individuals", whether they are politicians, actors, musicians, socialites or ordinary people. He further claims "without a background to provide clues about social status, the uniform presentation of each head places

[198] Michael Desmond, "The God-shaped Hole," *Portrait 38* (2011): 4.

each in a position of equality a democracy of effect that encourages comparison".[199] In short, Schoeller does not attempt to conceal anything of the topography of their faces in his photographs: facial hair, wrinkles and blemishes are exposed to the unflinching scrutiny of the photographer's lens. Schoeller chooses to photograph his subjects at eye level, looking directly at the camera, close up with a flat light to the centre of the face which is reflected in their eyes. Besides, the shallow depth of field emphasises the eyes, nose and mouth. Furthermore, the faces are expressionless. A deadpan expression denies the immediacy of emotion which in turn may heighten the viewer's curiosity about the subject beyond simply likeness and physicality.[200] Schoeller comments:

> A photographic close-up is perhaps the purest form of portraiture, creating a confrontation between the viewer and the subject that daily interaction makes impossible or at least impolite. In a close-up, the impact stems largely from the static subject's expression or apparent lack thereof, so the viewer is challenged to read a face without the benefit of the environment cues we naturally use to form our inter-personal reactions.[201]

The close-up expressionless face before the camera confounds the idea that a portrait can reveal something of the inner being of the subject that resonated during the nineteenth century with the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology. Indeed, Harry Berger argues a visible or compelling likeness in a portrait may embody something of the subject but is unable to reveal the true character or the inner soul of a person in an outward appearance. American photography curator Robert Sobieszek affirms this by stating, "Modernist photography [twentieth century] came gradually to renounce any concern for probing the human psyche and developed new goals, and most modern

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[199] Ibid, Desmond, 9.

[200] The expressionless deadpan aesthetic with subjects showing no physical emotion on their faces came into prominence in the 1990s. German photographers Bernd and Hilla Bechner, as well as British photographers Andreas Gursky and Thomas Ruff, and American Martin Schoeller have been influential in shaping this style of photography.

[201] www.acegallery.net/martinschoeller.

portraitists have come to doubt the camera's ability to explore inner character and emotional states".[202]

Schoeller may get close up and personal with the likes of the former President of the United States of America Barack Obama, *Barack Obama* (2004) (figure 41) and Australian actor Cate Blanchett, *Cate Blanchett* (2006) (figure 42) but what do these photographic portraits say about them that viewers don't already know from popular culture and social media? These deadpan photographs reveal their facial features—age, gender, ethnicity, and their outward appearance—clothes, hair style and make-up befitting their status, but say nothing of their personal selves—no personal items or jewellery adorn the body. While the viewer may speculate on the character of the subjects by looking at their faces, a moment of vulnerability perhaps in the facial expression of Obama or the steely confidence in the blue eyes of Blanchett, it is conjecture.

Figure 41: Martin Schoeller, *Barack Obama*, 2004

Figure 42: Martin Schoeller, *Cate Blanchett*, 2006

These close-up portraits strip away the artifice of the celebrity and show a more honest appraisal of the person without the staged effects normally associated

[202] Robert A. Sobieszek, *Ghost in the Shell: Photography and the Human Soul, 1850–2000*, (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1999), 23.

with celebrity social portraits. What is immediately evident in these two faces is their divergence from the dominant white European male face: Blanchett as an internationally renowned Australian woman actor of film and stage, and Obama as the first African-American President who became a powerful identifier of social and political change in the twenty-first century.

Conversely, Australian photographer Polly Borland's portraits of famous people have an edgy sensibility. By adding psychological tension, Borland is able to transform the portrait into an extraordinary expression of the socialised self. To achieve this, she places her subjects in what may appear uncompromising or unconventional poses to the camera or uses props and costumes to add intrigue or drama to the image. By way of example, in 2001 Borland took a number of photographic portraits of Queen Elizabeth II for her Golden Jubilee. In her portrait *Her Majesty, The Queen, Elizabeth II (Gold)* (2001) (Figure 43), the Queen looks to the lens, almost smiling and confidently engaging with the viewer. Nothing is unexpected in her appearance, with her quintessential hairstyle of white curls around her head, lightly powdered face, pink lipstick that contrasts beautifully with her blue suit patterned like ripples of water, three strands of pearls around her neck and two pearl earrings that complement her star studded diamond brooch. Her conventional likeness, however, contrasts with the gold lame backdrop which shouts to the viewer that 'Her Maj' is a modern day monarch with considerable wealth and influence on the world stage. Compared to Borland's photograph of Monica Lewinsky who is also wearing a blue suit and posed against a gold background, it embodies sadness and regret as she looks left as if unwilling to engage with the viewer.

The close-up portrait of Natalie Imbruglia *Natalie Imbruglia* (1999) (figure 44) also shows the singer looking to the side, the right as if something has momentarily distracted her but she remains composed. Here Borland captures the public face of the actor performing for the camera. A picturesque portrait of flawless beauty with large blue eyes and peach lips framed by her dark hair set against a vibrant blue background. The light obscures any imperfections on her pale complexion, unlike the close-up faces of Obama, Blanchett and the Queen. But like Obama and Blanchett it says nothing of the person, except her beauty.

Figure 43, Polly Borland, *Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (Gold)*, 2001
Figure 44, Polly Borland, *Natalie Imbruglia*, 1999

Around the same time, Borland portrayed expatriate feminist Germaine Greer seated naked on a white bed in a cool blue and white space *Professor Germaine Greer* (1999) (figure 45). The light focusses on her lightly tanned skin and smiling face, with her arms and legs positioned to conceal any embarrassment from the viewer's gaze of her breasts and vulva. There is, however, something unnerving about being scrutinised naked in a portrait, not that Greer has shied away from controversy in her life. Greer caused a social uproar in 1970 with her best known work *The Female Eunuch* on women's suppressed sexuality and has continued to do so as an academic and author over five decades. In 1971, she published controversial naked images of herself in unflattering poses lying on her back with her genitals and anus in plain view to demonstrate against the sexually explicit exploitation of women, in the feminist magazine *Suck* which she co-founded.[203] Conversely, she published a more modest naked photograph of herself looking seductively at the camera, stretched out naked on a floor propped up on her elbow, showing a breast but with a leg covering her genitals.[204]

[203] Jay Daniel Thompson, "Porn Sucks: The Transformations of Germaine Greer", M/C Journal, 19:4 (2016).
[204] Geoffrey Levy, "The Man Eater and the Narcissist", *Scottish Daily Mail* on 21 November 2015.

Figure 45, Polly Borland, *Professor Germaine Greer*, 1999

Does Borland seek to project Greer as unabashed in her nakedness, reiterating her outspokenness on the sexual liberation of women, or is there a hint of nervousness in her face as she laughs at the camera? Furthermore, her spectacles are placed on the bed beside her, did she decide at the last moment to remove them as an oversight or did she want to appear sexy, only wearing pearl earrings and appearing less 'stereotypically academic'? I would suggest in this portrait Greer poses naked to challenge deeply held views about beauty and the aging female body, and expression of female passivity in Western art and culture.

On one hand, celebrity culture is based on the desire for recognition and spectacle, famous people may choose to hide behind their celebrity status and socialised self, revealing little of their personal selves or private lives to adoring fans, or provoke debate by appearing naked for all to see. On the other hand, the commissioned portrait would generally seek to present a likeness of the subject within a social context for the purposes of commemoration of achievement. This does not mean the artist must take a conservative approach to portrait commissions.

Social masks and observational portraits

In the second part of this chapter, I further consider how people act out roles in society. First, I explore the conceptual approach to portraiture in theatrical and

video performances created by David Rosetzky and the subcultures by Nikki Toole. Then, I examine the power of observation in the documentary photography of Nikki Toole and Ingvar Kenne.

On the surface, Rosetzky questions portrait conventions of truth and authenticity by staging artifice and using affectless monologues in live performances. He portrays his subjects imprisoned in their existential angst of seeing themselves from how others perceive them in society. A pose or a gesture can embody an attitude or desire, clothing and symbols can highlight the fragmented and fragile nature of identity. Rosetzky wants "to explore the fracturing effects that global lifestyle culture can have on contemporary subjectivity and how interpersonal anxieties manifest as a result of a highly individualised and consumer focused culture", says art historian Daniel Palmer.[205] In conversation with the artist in 2014 and again in 2017, Rosetzky explains he is interested in the psychology of people and social cultures, about how people engage, respond emotionally and physically to everyday interactions with others in different situations, and construct social masks. He was influenced by British video artist Gillian Wearing who used masks to tell stories about alternate identities.[206]

The effects of his highly seductive artifice can be understood in one of Rosetzky's earlier video works *Justine* (2000) (figure 46), a portrait of a young woman caught up with the vacuous idea of how people see her public persona. The viewer is positioned as a voyeur who observes the red haired young woman in various scenes: out with friends for a meal, intimate moments with her tattooed boyfriend and/or in her stylised grey interior with designer white cat and retro tape player listening to music through white headphones. The protagonist adapts her mood and behaviour to the people around her, accentuating her inability to define a sense of self that appears on the surface shallow and superficial to the viewer. Her banal confessions in voice-overs highlight how she feels disconnected from herself, driven by a misplaced desire for approval from others and reinforced by the power of popular culture's hold on the public

[205] Daniel Palmer, "The Difficulty of Being Oneself: David Rosetzky's Moving Image Portraits," *Art & Australia* 48:3 (Autumn 2011): 1.
[206] Interviews with the artist, Appendix Eight, 369.

psyche. At one point the voice of the protagonist says "I feel like I have to create my whole lifestyle, like, does my music match my mood, my décor, my hair?" The protagonist feels she needs to create a social identity through a lifestyle of endless reflections and simulations seen in glossy magazines and on television that adds yet another layer of narcissism and insecurity.

Figure 46: David Rosetzky, *Justine*, 2000

At the same time, Rosetzky's work, *Weekender* (2001) signifies how consumer culture informs our identity and sense of self. A group of young people reflect on their personal relationships and lives which highlights the difficulties in communicating with others despite their desire to connect in a more intimate way. Similarly, *Custom–made* (2000) is about the desire for connectivity and togetherness but shows the difficulty people have with personal communications both real and imagined. The video shows people sitting in wood veneer alcoves giving personal anecdotes about their lives. It looks real but in fact is artifice. Here Rosetzky spliced together different peoples' stories, faded in and out images, to create the impression that it is true life.[207]

Similarly, photographer Nikki Toole focusses on how people's outward appearance and posture communicates something of their social selves. In her series *Roller Girls* (2011) she shows a sub-culture of young women who desire to act out their fantasies as sporting warriors within the realm of the national

[207] Interviews with the artist, Appendix Eight, 371.

Roller Derby League. The Derby is a fast-paced full contact sport played on roller skates in a tactical battle of speed skating and blocking to score points against another team. The sport is exhilarating and empowering as the roller girls physically act out their alter-egos. They go out to battle using pseudo-identities, such as Lucky Day, Scarlet O'Hurta, Devastatin Dotti and Slam Punk, who push and shove their way around the track. Slick graphic logo designs for each league set them apart.

Figure 47 and 48: Nikki Toole*, Lucky Day*, 2011

Nell 'Lucky Day' is typical of a roller girl from the League. She is a teacher by day and a sporting warrior at night battling it out for fun and excitement to win the game. The first photograph *Lucky Day* (2011) (figure 47) shows her seated waiting for the call to go to 'war' wearing her armour of black knee and arm guards and holding her black helmet with her pseudonym clearly painted in white. Tattoos of delicate foliage twist their way around each of her upper arms, like war paint. On the surface, she appears calm but is resolute, the warrior stares straight at the viewer, challenging the audience (as pseudo opponents) to defy her in battle. In the second photograph (figure 48), Day stands tall in a fighting stance, emotionless, holding her helmet and a pair of dusty skates. The emblem of her league the *Fitzroy Crossing W.A*. is clearly displayed on her chest.

The inspiration for these portraits, says Toole, is nineteenth century military portraiture, from the early tintype photography of young soldiers readying for war to the majestic military paintings hanging in many Scottish castles. The war portrait was a historical marker of military status with the subject shown in battle dress and body armour. Swap the subjects in these photographic portraits from military men in battle armour to Roller Derby girls in their body armour, and a crew of female warriors is born.[208] Toole's tough gritty girls of the Roller Derby scene are viewed as modern-day warriors ready for war donning their armour for the battle ahead. "Similar to military regalia, roller derby's visual language and symbols are familiar to the initiated but remain elusive to the outsider", writes Lucy Quinn, herself a roller girl.[209] While their body armour may mask the women's true identity, the photographic portraits by Toole capture the narrative of the sporting battle and the spectacle of the League. The roller girls were photographed in sharp natural daylight to highlight the bright colours of their battle dress within a small courtyard space to mimic the unadorned confined spaces of castle walls.

In his early works, Rosetzky used friends and peers as actors for his videos, photographs and photo-collages. Since 2003, he has worked collaboratively with lots of talented and creative people—actors, dance choreographers, sound technicians and cinematographers, partly he says because he can learn from them about doing things differently and he has a relatively small budget for the type of work he does. Dance and choreography has become an important vehicle of his work to explore abstract modes of expression.

In one of Rosetsky's better known works, a ten-minute video portrayal of Cate Blanchett *Portrait of Cate Blanchett* (2008) (figure 49), he presents a construct of identity as a theatrical performance. He does not attempt to reveal the character of Blanchett but provides a multifaceted view of her social identity as an actor. Rosezky outlines his reasoning behind the work, "the challenge for me was to create a pluralist view of identity of the actor not the real person in a portrait".[210]

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[208] Interview with the artist, Appendix Nine, 375.
[209] Roulette Rouge (aka Lucy Quinn), "Elle On Wheels", *Portrait 46*, (2013): 43.
[210] Interview with artist, Appendix Eight, 371.

In other words, he does not explore the person behind the mask but makes the social mask transparent to the viewer. The work symbolises the actor's craft, of abstract modes of expression in different roles through simple movements, gestures and dance sequences.

Figure 49: David Rosetzky, *Portrait of Cate Blanchett*, 2008

It begins with a close up of the actor's hands and an infinite variety of communicative gestures, then Blanchett's face gently comes into focus. The viewer subsequently observes a sequenced choreographed performance of dressing and shedding layers of clothing which is accompanied by a soundtrack, as the actor muses about her performance roles in voiceovers. The peeling away of clothing, like a veil that actors discard in performances, does not constitute Blanchett's personal identity but reveals aspects of her socialised self, as she moves to disentangle herself from her characters. Finally, Blanchett disrobes and places the clothing on a chair, thus concluding the performance. The portrayal of the actor as a sound and visual composition was filmed over six hours on site in a set workshop of the Sydney Theatre Company where Blanchett was then a Director.

The success of the Blanchett commission from the National Portrait Gallery created other professional opportunities for Rosetzky, including a commission from the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne titled *Half Brother* (2011) which was a response to the death of his father and sorting through his personal things. The video shows actors moving around the floor sorting, stacking papers as an homage to his father memory and his creativity.

While social portraits can mask the identity of a subject, observational and documentary photographic portraits seek to capture humanity and human experience. They may give the appearance of being caught unawares by the photographer but are more likely a prearranged reality or fiction. Observational portraits suggest a visual narrative of people's lives and yet these portraits can play on the ambiguity between observation and illusion, whereas the power of documentary photography lies in its premise of real-life situations that are more often socially, politically or culturally driven. These types of photography emerged as a popular practice in the twentieth century and remains so today. That is not to say analogue photography was not staged to create new meanings in the mind of the viewer. It relied more on the ability of the photographer to capture a perceived moment in time, that is, the indexical quality of what it represents. French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson became famous for presenting a decisive or dramatic 'moment of transition' in his still photography. He achieved this by suggesting to the viewer that the particular moment seen before them in the image is but one of many images in an unfolding narrative, a fragment of a larger picture about a person, place or event. Max Dupain and Harold Cazeaux were also masterful in their ability to stage 'realism' and emotion in iconic settings that spoke of the Australian vernacular, being those enduring elements of Australian life. While the unbiased truth of photography has always been under suspicion, the digital medium gives the photographer greater power to alter an image and create an illusion of reality. In the twenty-first century, digital imaging is able to build on this capacity for artifice in the minds of the artist, subject and viewer by adding a new dimension of creativity to the visual representation.

Alternatively, British art historian Julian Stallabrass views Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra as one of the most successful and purist contemporary observational photographers, along with German photographer Thomas Ruff. Dijkstra is renowned for her documentary series that capture 'a moment in the lives' of youths, mothers and babies, children and soldiers as an expression of humanity. He considers her images to be "straightforward pictures that reveal little overt intervention or even composition but rather present the human

subject in a standarized frame".[211] Taking this a step further, he contends that her documentary photographs are contrary to the 'mannered' portraiture of celebrities in which the individuality of the subject is paramount. He comments:

> A prominent and distinct strand has become established in contemporary art photography in which people are depicted in uniform series, usually one per picture, and placed centrally in that picture, facing the camera head-on and gazing into the lens. These people are represented straightforwardly, without much apparent intervention by the photographer, and the series displays manifestly uniform characteristics. Since many of the pictorial elements controlled by the photographer are held standard, variability from picture to picture occurs mostly in the particularities of the subject.[212]

Although Stallabrass may view the documentary mode of photography as shunning lyricism or overt identification with the subject, in this chapter I show this is not always the case.

Furthermore, art historian Daniel Palmer refers to 'relational' portraiture that involves using the camera as a vehicle for a social encounter, interaction or exchange between strangers rather than purely documentation of the moment.[213] He advocates that people collaborate in the taking of a photograph, as an interaction between strangers. This is evident in Nikki Toole's portraits, she affirms this by saying "Whether my subjects recreate a moment of isolation, a state of mind while skating or the formality of readying themselves for battle [roller girls], they are a collaborator and I am the director and editor of the encounter".[214] Thus, observational and documentary portraits are not an objective portrayal of the subject but a collaboration between photographer and subject, no matter how subtle or overt.

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[211] Julian Stallabrass, "What is in a Face? Blankness and Significance in Contemporary Art Photography," *October Magazine*, no. 122 (Fall 2007): 74.
[212] Ibid, Stallabrass, 71.
[213] Daniel Palmer, *Photography and Collaboration: From Conceptual Art to Crowdsourcing* (New York Bloomsbury, 2017), 110.
[214] Interview with the artist, Appendix Nine, 374.

Figure 50, Nikki Toole, *Daniel Whitechurch and Laura McKellar, Fitzroy*, 2009; *Filippo Mazzaeeara, The Spot Skatepark, Ostia, Rome*, 2010

Toole evokes empathy towards the solitary life of the skateboarder which is captured in the faces she photographed around the world over a three-year period from 2009 to 2011. Initially, she photographed friends who were part of the local skate scene in Fitzroy, an inner suburb of Melbourne. To expand her understanding of the sub-culture, she reached out to other skaters on her overseas travels. This led her to photographing male and female skaters of all ages from different cultures and countries and uploading the portraits onto the internet. In figure 50, the skaters stand facing the camera, expressionless with their mind seemingly engaged elsewhere, as though momentarily stopped for the photograph. On first glance, it may seem odd that Toole captures the skaters standing still holding their skateboards rather than taking the motion shots that are normally associated with skateboarding. In these portraits, Toole seeks to expresses the solitary headspace skaters experience while skating. She explains:

> I was interested to see if there was a way to capture this sense of being in the zone while skating without taking photographs of the skaters in action. I was also interested in local cultural difference in skater culture, in terms of fashion styles and personal expression. Is there a global look or is there still a place for the individual or the loner to express him or herself?[215]

[215] Christopher Chapman, "Mind and Body," *Portrait 42* (2012): 20.

Toole purposely captures her subjects dressed in everyday clothing in the spaces they inhabit, whether it is in skate parks, on urban streets or at the beach. The skaters in these two black and white photographic portraits dressed in modern casual clothing are evidently part of the street scene with art and graffiti seen on the brick walls behind them.

Like Toole, photographer Ingvar Kenne seeks to present a moment in the lives of citizens which the viewer can share. April Thompson sums up Kenne's style by stating, "it is this deceptively simplistic quality that enables his photographs to work as impromptu but intimate portraits and encourages us to feel a sense of familiarity with his subjects".[216] The power of his portraits is the subject's quiet discomposure that reveals or conceals just enough about a person to intrigue the viewer as to its social meaning. At the same time, some of his portraits can be unsettling with undercurrents of sadness and hopelessness, while others offer moments of pathos.

In his ongoing portrait series *Citizen* of people from different walks of life and backgrounds, Kenne conveys something of the shared human experiences of the world's people.[217] The initial book of the series contains 110 portraits spanning fifteen years from 1997 to 2012. Many of the portraits are emblematic of the subject's generation as shown in the clothes they wear and the places they frequent. While some of the citizens in his photographs are instantly recognisable as local personalities, celebrities, as well as Kenne's own family, whereas others are unknown. The indexical description of the person by number, name, date and status—porn star, prisoner, sex offender, prostitute or nun—offers a simple clue to their social identity. By applying the same photographic parameters to his work, Kenne has successfully created an intimate collection of portraits of people that represent the complexity of the human experience, cultural and social difference. His portraits capture a common understanding of humanity in all its frailty, beauty and imperfection. With this

[216] April Thompson, "Citizen Kenne," *Portrait*, 44 (2012): 19.
[217] A fragment of his portrait stories in *Citizen* was shown in an exhibition of his work at the National Portrait Gallery in late 2013.

seemingly democratic approach to his photographs, he resists any sort of personal agenda or scrutiny of the subjects.

Figure 51: Ingvar Kenne, *Lee Lin Chin*, 2003
Figure 52: Ingvar Kenne, *Nick Cave*, date unknown

His portrait of Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) television news presenter Lee Lin Chin (figure 51), known for her ultra-stylish clothes and dramatic facial appearance with big eyes and lips, is shown bare foot in front of a roughly painted nondescript door of a building situated in an alleyway somewhere in inner city Sydney. She stands with her hands turned outwards to accentuate the cut of the sleeves of the robe, however, there is little to outwardly suggest her professional identity and celebrity status. The style of the clothing hints at her Chinese heritage, although the graffiti on the door behind her would not be regarded as a Chinese symbol but perhaps more musical in style. There is a subtle play of shadows from the nearby tree against the walls and doors that suggests the fading light of the afternoon and perhaps a metaphor for her fading celebrity status.

By contrast, in another portrait *Nick Cave* (date unknown) (figure 52) Cave wears an AC/DC t-shirt that hints at his rock status but is seen as an average bloke wearing a suit partaking in a typical Australian pastime of playing pool in a local public bar. He gives the appearance of being caught unawares by the photographer but I suggest it is staged. He hides his face behind his arm,

perhaps this is more simply because he has smoke in his eyes from his cigarette but it creates an illusion that he is trying to conceal his identity. This image of Cave as an ordinary person by Kenne is in stark contrast to the idealised portrait of him by Arkley, discussed earlier in the chapter.

Figure 53: Ingvar Kenne, *Cormac + Callum Kenne,* 2009

In 2009, Kenne won the National Photographic Portrait Prize for his portrait *Cormac and Callum* (2008) (figure 53). The winning portrait that shows his two sons, Cormac aged seven and Callum aged nine, dressed in their swimming togs standing beside a foaming indoor spa-pool is underwhelming in its composition. The boys pose obediently if not impatiently, with their arms beside their bodies, solemn faced as though they have been chastised or warned about their behaviour in the pool. One child has orange flippers on his feet that match the orange bollards against the back wall, and the other child's feet are not visible which could be regarded as an oddity of the image.

In this context, I return to Annear's observation about two antecedents of contemporary portrait photography: one that strives to capture a moment in transition while acknowledging the constructed nature of the image, and the other that can only be regarded as fiction. Looking at this another way, Anne Marsh asserts:

> There are no longer clear distinctions between fashion, advertising, documentary and art photography: as a result of postmodernism where all codes were considered equal, we have inherited a merger of visual codes. Advertising looks like art, fashion photography creates narratives, documentary truths are stages and visual languages converge.[218]

With this in mind, I make a brief historical reference to the work of renowned twentieth century American art photographer Richard Avedon. He constructed illusions of reality by actively staging and contriving the 'truth' in his art photography. Infused with drama and movement in its composition, his portraits possess an air of uncertainty and ambiguity. It was Avedon's ability to capture people in seemingly spontaneous 'unguarded moments' that created a perception of realism, in some cases an impossible reality. In this way, the photographs by Avedon differ from those of Toole and Kenne which present to the viewer an awareness of the real lives of people in a moment of transition. Kenne asserts he has no preconceived narrative in mind as he photographs citizens. Toole seeks to capture a visual narrative, as she observes and records a moment in the lives of ordinary people. This is not to say that contemporary photographers do not embrace the digital medium to improve the quality of the image through high photographic resolution and editing in their photographic portraits. Kenne edits and crops the image to achieve the desired effect, whereas Toole presents more straightforward portraits of people with little apparent digital intervention. In so far as the photographs by Toole and Kenne seek to capture human experience in their portraits by contextualising the subjects in their environments, they are in fact a pre-arranged reality.

In this chapter, I have shown that social portraits can reveal more than the socialised self, the external signs of social status and place in society of the rich and famous, they can record the lives of ordinary people as a marker of social identity and humanity. At the same time, I have acknowledged the constructed nature of the image. A portrait cannot be taken at face value, often showing how

[218] Anne Marsh, *Look Contemporary Australian Photography Since 1980* (Melbourne: MacMillan, 2010), 10.

the subject wants to be seen or known, or for that matter how the artist sees them which may suggest an alternate narrative. Thus, the degree to which the artist accurately represents the facial features of the subject or reframes fame has always been a matter for debate.

The truth in photography has always been under suspicion but no more so than today with the emergence of digital imaging and hyperreal imagery. Artists and photographers are defying the conventions of portraiture associated with mimesis and authenticity by pursing fantasy and fiction in portrait narratives. In the next chapter, I examine the influence of hyperreality on contemporary portraiture and explore how portrait artists today posit alternate representations of truth as illusions of reality.

CHAPTER FOUR: PORTRAITS AS ILLUSIONS OF REALITY

Digital imaging as a pervasive and pertinent medium of creativity and expression is bringing about contemporary change in visual culture. How artists and ordinary people use and adapt new technologies has become a key driver in changing how we view portraiture and understand verisimilitude. An illusion or fictional image may be desirable because it can overcome imperfections or anxieties about the semblance of truth in portraits. That is not to say that artists and their subjects of past eras did not create illusions in painted portraits, as outlined in the historical context in Chapter One. The difference today is that artists, photographers and ordinary people are defying the conventions of portraiture by challenging the very idea of originality and mimesis with digital imaging in which the digitally constructed portrait or enhanced photograph becomes the reality. I reiterate, the value of the digital image may lie less in its authenticity and more in its ability to obscure reality. Nevertheless, digital imaging is less about the technology and more about the way in which artists absorb new media and their aesthetic implications that gives the digital medium its presence in contemporary portraiture.

It is unsurprising then that journeys into hyperreality are now commonplace in portraiture. The heightened sense of realism in hyperreal imagery challenges historical notions of truth and likeness with falsehoods that create visual and conceptual uncertainty, and with this comes the inability of the conscious and unconscious mind to distinguish reality from a simulacrum. Michael Desmond makes an important point by stating that "humans are hardwired to respond to faces and emotions and the increasing reliance on electronic communications means that we are increasingly prepared to accept the symbol or the simulation, as well as the real thing".[219] In the same spirit, Max Kozloff when considering the

[219] Desmond, *Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the Digital Age*, 10.

theatre of the face in portraits, contends veracity is obscured with alternative meanings of reality that rely on elaborate subterfuge. He remarks, "Computer tweaking can invert the act of witness and make it tell another tale, or it can depict nominal sitters who are spectacularly not themselves. One understands why some artist photographers reject humble human theatre and image a surrogate race …"[220]

In this chapter, I explore how portrait artists today posit alternate representations of truth as illusions of reality. In doing so, I examine how contemporary artists use both digital imaging and established media to manipulate perceptions of reality by blurring the boundaries between truth and fiction in portraiture.

The chapter has three parts.

In the first part, I examine in more depth the paradox of hyperreality where the image becomes 'more real than reality itself' as proposed by Jean Baudrillard. As a key to understanding the concept of hyperreality, I analyse the works by photo-artist Petrina Hicks and those of Loretta Lux. In the second part, I examine the semi-autobiographical 'out of time' photographic tableaux by Tracey Moffatt that express an overt fakery in grand narratives and melodramas played out in movie-style sets, as well as the impersonations and disguises presented by Christian Bumbarra Thompson. Then, I show how the painted portrait interiors by Jude Rae draw on the aesthetics of Dutch artist Vermeer in a weave of illusion and mindfulness. Lastly, I examine some of the amorphous hybrid forms created by Patricia Piccinini.

Literature available on the artists and their work varies considerably—monographs, survey and exhibition catalogues, journal and media articles. Much has been written by the artist and others on Tracey Moffatt's work since the late 1980s with her enigmatic series *Something More* (1989) to her recent works, including her latest film works at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017). Similarly,

[220] Max Kozloff, *The Theatre of the Face: Portrait Photography Since 1900*, (London: Phaidon, 2007), 315.

Patricia Piccinini's work has been the subject of several monographs *Once upon a time* (2011), *Relativity* (2010), *We are family* (2003), *Retrospectology* (2002) and *Call of the Wild* (2002), as well as journal and media articles. Less, however, has been written about the works of Petrina Hicks, Jude Rae *Jude Rae* (2006) and Christian Thompson *Ritual Intimacy* (2017) *and Australian Graffiti* (2008). No major literature on Hicks. Pertinent texts and works have been discussed in the body of the chapter to support the hypothesis and arguments, and referenced in the bibliography. In addition, interviews with Hicks, Rae and Piccinini, as well as other artists (see Appendices), and viewing of actual works in artist studios, private and public galleries, have provided valuable reference material for this thesis.

Illusions of reality

Just as Jean Baudrillard argues modern society has lost sight of what is truth with the hyperreal becoming a substitute for reality, so to the aesthetic illusion in contemporary portraiture is suffused with new meanings. Baudrillard considers the simulacrum or simulation to be an abstraction of the real world which by its very form inaugurates the power of the illusion. He states:

> Virtuality tends towards the perfect illusion. But it isn't the same creative illusion as that of the image. It is a 'recreating' illusion (as well as a recreational one), revivalistic, realistic, mimetic, hologrammatic. It abolishes the game of illusion by the perfection of the reproduction, in the virtual rendition of the real. And so we witness the extermination of the real by its double.[221]

Thus, the world is no more real than the images that represents it in mass media because as an illusion they bear no relation to reality. This culminates as a modern dilemma: either simulation is irreversible, as there is nothing beyond simulation other than the banality of everyday existence, or there is an art of simulation, an ironic quality that evokes the appearances of the world as a

[221] Jean Baudrillard, "Objects, Images, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion", ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Jean Baudrillard, Art and Artefact* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 1997): 9.

simulacrum. On the art of simulation, he says " … representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelopes the whole edifice of the representation as itself a simulacrum".[222] He explains there are four successive phases in the shift from representation to simulation: the image reflects a basic reality; perverts the reality; masks the absence of reality and lastly achieves a hyperreality without origin.

From these remarks, we can begin to understand the significance of a world of simulations in mass media and visual culture in which hyperreality transcends reality. Despite the unremitting pessimism of many of the messages in his writings of the late twentieth century, Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality in which the image becomes more real than reality remains relevant in today's techno-culture.

To further understand the concept of hyperreality, first I consider how digital photography can create, alter and present an image or portrait as a new actuality. Digital images can traverse the truth, where the origin or authenticity of the image is no longer deemed important, relevant or even mandatory. While still photography as a medium became regarded as a mirror with a memory able to record faithful images of the human experience at a moment in time, discourse about photographic truth in the networked-digital age is obsolete. According to Helen Ennis, "claims for the death of the portrait are becoming insistent with the advent of digital imaging and the loss of faith in photographic truth".[223] No longer is the rhetorical indexical quality of the image, the physical presence at the moment of exposure, the core feature of digital photography. The authenticity of the photographic image has always been under suspicion but no more resoundingly than with digital imaging which affords new possibilities of technical mastery and fictitious realism. As with Baudrillard's four phases of simulation, if on one hand, the image is seen to imitate reality or resemble reality of what the viewer believes exists, then the image is likely to be regarded a truthful representation of the subject. If on the other hand, the image has been

[222] Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations", *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, 170.
[223] Helen Ennis, *Mirror with a Memory: Photographic Portraiture in Australia*, 7.

enhanced or altered to convey an illusion of truth, then what is represented becomes the reality, a hyperreality, that influences audience perceptions.

Photographer Petrina Hicks brings together incongruous elements and creates a sense of polarity within one image. Her large scale photographs are both alluring and unsettling in their illusions of reality that have an underlying ambiguous message, with a hint of portent or something more subversive. She says:

> I was always interested in photography how I could somehow try to correlate the polarity or difference between two opposing forces. I remember always trying to work out how I could achieve this within just one single photograph, whether it be a push-pull effect where you pull in one direction but it repels in another.[224]

Furthermore, by employing the visual language of advertising and consumerism in her illusory artistry, she probes and subverts stereotypes of femininity and the female form, with notions of perfection and imperfection in her work. For her, consumerism is about seduction that creates false promises of satisfaction in the minds of consumers. The paradox is desires or false promises are never quite realised which lures the consumer to want more and more of the same. Hicks explains her approach is simultaneously elusive and seductive. "So the images looked desirable on the surface, but I was aiming to corrupt this process of seduction. There are elements in my images that evoke desire and emotion, yet the images remain ambiguous because the signs to decode them are absent".[225] In doing so, Hicks leaves the viewer unsatisfied in their quest for greater meaning or truth behind her hyperreal images. She further explains:

> The surface of the images is parading as commercial photographs, but the underlying ideas don't allow for the images to be consumed as such. I've always been drawn to the idea of creating images that are beautiful and desirable on the surface, that draw people in … but then gently pulling the rug away, before they've realized it. These images promise satisfaction, but don't deliver it in the

[224] Interview with artist, Appendix Four, 337.
[225] Carrie Miller, "Seductive Subversion," *Art Collector*, Issue 65, July-September (2013): 126.

> expected way, the way we are conditioned to read commercial photographs.[226]

Considering how Hicks brings together these incongruous elements in her work, I argue she seeks to counteract the falsehoods of beauty and perfection associated with consumerism and mass media in her photography by creating an ambiguous sub-text in which images of women and girls with animals, birds and objects are placed in strange juxtapositions. Her glossy, stylised photographs are disconcerting and enthralling in their ambiguity and duality: perfection and imperfection, beauty and the grotesque, familiarity and strangeness. In short, she singles out illusory devices of perfect pink roses, white lace face veils, soft pink jumpers, bunches of grapes and so forth, as false promises of over-saturated feminine symbolism to seduce audiences to the point of nausea.

This is evident in a recent work *New Age* (2013) (figure 54) that depicts the torso of a naked woman sitting on red fabric slung over a stool with a sash of blue draped behind her. In a pose reminiscent of an ancient marble statue, only her belly, thighs and her left arm are displayed. Indeed, this new age goddess can be compared to the Greek and Roman statues of Aphrodite and Venus as classical ideals of female beauty and sexuality. Such symbolism preoccupies the viewer's eye which is drawn to a v-shaped white crystal placed in the woman's groin that disturbs or ruptures the calm countenance of her soft pale flesh. Two eras are colliding here.

[226] Ibid, Miller, 126.

Figure 54: Petrina Hicks, *New Age*, 2013

Figure 55: Petrina Hicks, *Venus*, 2013

The enduring symbols of female form and fertility in art history—that is, Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* and Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*—are visible in Hicks composed sculptural forms. This is manifest in the crystals filling the origin of the world in figure 54, as well as the face of a young woman obscured by an enormous shell in *Venus* (2013) in figure 55. In ancient mythology, Venus was born upon a seashell and following on from this, the pink conch shell has long been a symbol of female fertility and sexuality. The way in which the shell overwhelms the girl's face and masks her identity is a wry comment by Hicks on the over-representation of the female face and genitalia in mass media and popular culture today. She states, "Venus explores my own feelings of being overwhelmed by the over-sexualised and unrealistic images of women we are exposed to. *Venus* is my response to these images".[227]

[227] www.uq.edu.au/nationalartistsself-portraitprize2013/petrinahicks.

Figure 56: Petrina Hicks, *Shenae and Jade*, 2005

Figure 57: Petrina Hicks, *Emily the Strange*, 2011

In other examples of her illusory artistry, Hicks places children with animals and birds together in disharmony, thereby, creating a duality or a polarity. In the image of *Shenae and Jade* (2005) (figure 56), the viewer's eyes are drawn to the budgerigar's head in the girl's mouth. Hicks places the girl and bird in a *mise-en-scene*, a visually artful surreal setting that is visually compelling, if not a little absurd. Instead of reassuring the audience that the budgie is not being harmed, the work elicits an uneasiness and sense of anticipated doom. She says:

> You're not instantly repulsed by it, so you can't really tell the difference between what's repulsive and what's appealing or the duality between the potential violence of the image or is it just a beautiful image? The boundary between the two—the girl and the bird—as opposing forces is quite blurred as well. It's a subtle polarity.[228]

To seduce the viewer, Hicks contrasts the disquiet of the budgie's fate with the stillness of the girl who has her eyes closed, as though she is unaware of what she is doing. Hicks makes clear the budgie is not a real bird but a taxidermy budgie. She wrapped some cling wrap around the bird's head so that the girl

[228] Interview with the artist, Appendix Four, 337.

would feel more at ease with the budgie in her mouth.[229] The luminescent soft background and pale colouration of the girl's complexion, hair and clothing throws the headless body of the brightly coloured yellow-green budgie into high relief. Hicks creates a simulacrum, a hyperreal image of improbable reality. Furthermore, in *Emily the Strange* (2011) (figure 57), Hicks again disrupts the usual beguiled response of the senses to a beautiful young girl in a pretty pale pink dress frilled with lace who is holding a pet cat, a hairless eerie creature, and yet also beautiful in an unconventional sense. She says in a subtle way, she is trying to put subterfuge, little ruptures and ambiguities into the one image. "So it's a pink cat with beautiful soft colours and because it's hairless there's an ugliness to the cat. We want to love the image but we don't feel as satisfied with it so we feel dissatisfied".[230] These two images are not simple portraits of children and pets but images that destablise social ideals and cultural beliefs about femininity, beauty and perfection. She uses animals to represent aspects of the human psyche and ambiguous ideals of humanity. Since the beginning of time, people have sought out animals to represent human emotions in art, film and books. Furthermore, Hicks creates the illusory quality of the images using a pale palette of colours and soft lighting.

With her hyperreal images, Hicks seeks to counteract stereotypes and dominant ideologies about female gender that operate at both conscious and unconscious levels within Western society. Hicks affirms her work has always been viewed as portraiture but for her it is not about conveying something about the inner qualities of the subject but the outer physical, elusive quality of the person. This can be understood in how Hicks looks beyond mere likeness of a person to highlight how fragile and selective notions of beauty and perfection are in popular culture. Whether it is a portrait of a nude girl with one arm, a young girl with Albinism (Lauren) or women and girls with animals, she challenges the historical view of female beauty and form in art and photography with

[229] Interview with the artist, Appendix Four, 338.
[230] Interview with the artist, Appendix Four, 338.

falsehoods. For Hicks, Lauren has an illusory, fantastical quality of other worldliness with her pale skin and white blond hair, more real than real.[231]

In the three photographs of Lauren, *Lauren with Eyes Closed*, *Lauren in Red*, and *Lauren with Eyes Open* (2003) (figure 58), Hicks asks, who is the real Lauren? She purposefully subverts the perceived objectivity of the camera with subtle changes and invites the viewer to choose the real Lauren from the three illusory, hyperreal portraits.[232] Hicks again questions conventional thinking around female beauty and perfection.

Figure 58: Petrina Hicks, *Lauren with Eyes Closed*, *Lauren in Red*, *Lauren with Eyes Open*, 2003

In presenting these similar photographic portraits of Lauren, Hicks conjures up the kind of variations of an image typically found on a photographer's proof sheet whether from a commissioned portrait or an advertising session. The three images may look perfect on the outside but explore a sub-text associated with imperfection. Hicks may imply her Albinism, a genetic trait that in itself can be perceived as imperfect, is as an aberration through Lauren's unearthly and ethereal appearance. In these portraits, Hicks creates an almost sterile aesthetic of Lauren's 'whiteness', removing any imperfections in her pale skin and long sleek platinum blond hair against a clear white background that frames the

[231] Interview with the artist, Appendix Four, 349.
[232] Michael Desmond, "Is the Truth of Portraiture Vested Exclusively in Likeness?" *Portrait 21*, (2006).

fragility of her idealised beauty. "I chose Lauren as the subject for this portrait because she embodies qualities of grace and elegance. I was trying to create a calm, still and eerie portrait that portrayed an almost spiritual or mystical quality, with an underlying tension between perfection and imperfection".[233]

Within this frame of understanding, the portrait bust shot looks more sculptural in form than a photograph of a real person which is somewhat disquieting. This is most evident in the face of *Lauren with Eyes Closed,* where Lauren disengages fully from the viewer and appears like an object. In neither of the other two portraits do her eyes engage directly with the viewer, however, there is a sense of self-awareness as though Lauren is lost in her own thoughts during a moment of reflection. By disengaging from the viewer, the face is open to more scrutiny, more time to examine the facial features and ponder who is the real Lauren. By presenting a blank face, Hicks is constructing a veiled image of Lauren that conveys little of the person other than her outward appearance, being her paleness, the shape of her face, style of hair and clothing. The portrait of Lauren without clothing provides no clues to the viewer as to her background or possible character. Thus, such a pose can mask the true identity of the subject. On the other hand, *Lauren in Red* is clothed providing the viewer with something more tangible than the promise of perfection. The red floral shirt and tie are an accepted style of masculine Western clothing that is not usually worn by women. In these portraits of Lauren, Hicks purposefully questions the thinking around ideals of feminine beauty in contemporary society.

In another image of *Lauren* (2003) (figure 59), the subject is presented as more real, more human with the movement of her hand to her face and her eyes looking to the side. She appears self-conscious as though observing someone, observing her or some event taking place on her periphery. Again, the image is almost colourless—white on white with her pale alabaster skin, white blond hair and a white shirt—shot against neutral background so as not to distract from the subject being photographed. The only hint of colour is the blue of her eyes.

[233] www.ccpr.murdoch.edu.au.

Figure 59: Petrina Hicks, *Lauren*, 2003

In preparation for her 2018 exhibition, Hicks is again focusing on the human–animal duality, the illusory fantastical space with images of Lauren, goats, snakes and especially piglets with their smooth pale pink skin.

Continuing with the theme of falsehoods of beauty and imperfection, an earlier image *Untitled #1* (2011) (figure 60), is a rather innocuous and yet strange image of four teenage girls, one of whom pulls up her t-shirt to reveal a gaping wound in her side. Hicks again highlights there are alternative truths hidden beneath the surface of perfection. In this photograph, three girls question what they see before them on the body of their companion. Hicks comments, "It is with cold fascination rather than concern or dismay that they lean closer, and one cringingly probes the open flesh with her finger".[234] The image makes reference to the message behind a seventeenth century Baroque painting by Caravaggio *Doubting St Thomas* (1602-3) (figure 61). Caravaggio suggests in true Baroque fashion that there is more to what is immediately evident or understood beneath the surface of the image. American art historian Simon Schama observes Caravaggio's painting that shocked audiences at the time "all decorous euphemisms are abandoned … Christ's hand with the stigmata on its back steers the horny finger of Thomas deep into the lipped almond shaped wound in his

[234]www.petrinahicks.com.

own body …"[235] Schama further explains it is not enough to observe Christianity but to evoke true believers, you must register the spectacle viscerally, on your flesh. True to history, Hicks places the hand of the seduced on the arm of the perpetrator who probes the flesh with her finger. At the same time, she reveals the false promise of perfection to the viewer that beauty is indeed only skin deep.

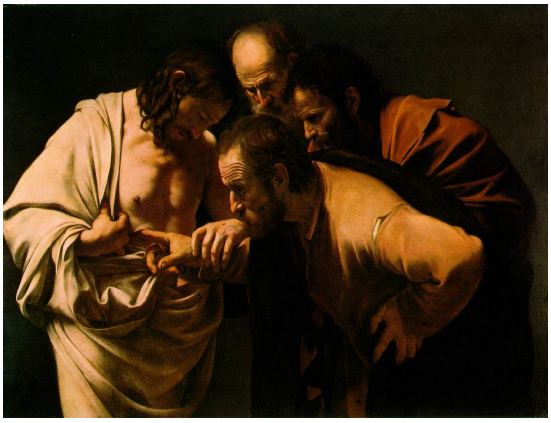

Figure 60: Petrina Hicks, *Untitled #1*, 2011

Figure 61: Vincenzo Caravaggio, *Doubting St Thomas*, 1602-03

Hicks utilises her experience of commercial photography and the editing software Photoshop to create her hyperreal photographic portraits and moving images. She creates her images in front of the camera, with as little editing as possible and achieves the airbrushed look through lighting in the studio to achieve a hyperreal quality. She shoots her subjects on medium–format film because it has an 'emotional quality' over digital, makes high resolution scans of the images and then prints. "I try to get everything right in the sculpture [photo-shoot] first but working with animals and humans, and shooting on film can be quite complicated. Animals don't really listen".[236]

In order to further explore the effects of hyperreality on contemporary portraiture, I compare the aesthetic qualities of the portrait works of German-born Loretta Lux with those of Hicks. While Hicks creates unsettling images of

[235]Simon Schama, *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, (London: BBC Books, 2006), 56.
[236] Interview with the artist, Appendix Four, 343.

strange juxtapositions that reveal an ambiguous sub-text, Lux blurs reality and fiction in dream-like timeless worlds.

Figure 62: Loretta Lux, *Portrait of Antonia*, 2007

The subjects in Lux's photographic portraits are mostly children who have a story-book charm about them as if they are out of the pages of Lewis Carroll books and the world of Alice in Wonderland. They have an ethereal beauty, like living porcelain dolls but also appear surreal with their oversized heads on slender bodies. Lux seeks to captivate and intrigue audiences with their unreal beauty and emotionless expressions. Michael Desmond appraises Lux's portraits as sentimental and sweetly beautiful but with a disturbing undercurrent. "The idealisation of her subjects is beyond realism, almost too perfect … prompting an uncanny response".[237] By way of example, I consider Lux's portrait of *Antonia* (2007) (figure 62), with her curls tied back from her pale face, her blue eyes look away in a moment of reflection as if she could be hiding a secret and is unwilling or unable to share it with the viewer. The background of pale yellow rendered walls complements the girl's blue and white checked dress and her hairstyle gives an impression of a world from a past era or a story book. Lux uses a mix of digital photography and painted surfaces to create an ultra-real image in which the child appears part of a fictional narrative.

[237] Desmond, *Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the Digital Age*, 38.

Figure 63: Loretta Lux, *Sasha and Ruby,* 2005

Figure 64: Diane Arbus, *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey,* 1967

This is also evident in Lux's staged portrait *Sasha and Ruby* (2008) (figure 63). She depicts twin girls with matching auburn hair styles and blue dotty dresses, and glazed hooded eyes that glance slightly downward giving an inwardly pensive expression. One girl puts her hand on the back of the other without acknowledging any emotion and yet knowingly they stand together motionless in a dream-like state. The portrait is less about the subjects themselves as a semblance of likeness and more about childhood and togetherness, as twin siblings inhabiting a child's fictional world. This could not be said of an earlier photograph *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey* (1967) (figure 64) by notable twentieth century photographer Diane Arbus which is more concerned with the identity of the children imbricated within the social landscape. At first glance, each twin is a reflection of the other as they stand motionless facing the camera. On further examination, small differences in their physical make-up and appearance become more pronounced, such as one girl quietly smiles and the other does not. While this image is deceptively simple, it belies the complexity of meaning of individual sensibility within society. Like Hicks and Lux, Arbus has chosen a neutral background, giving few clues to social context other than the floor tiles, the girls' clothing and hairstyle.

Figure 65: Loretta Lux, *The Waiting Girl*, 2006

Importantly, Lux says she doesn't usually offer an explanation about the meaning of her images. Like other artists, she prefers to let the audience discover what they will from her work. However, in a rare moment for the media in 2006, she elaborated on the portrait of Dorothea and a cat waiting for eternity in *The Waiting Girl* (2006) (figure 65). "It's a picture about time, and timelessness. The girl and the cat are frozen in time. For me, they are sitting on the sofa as if they are waiting for eternity … she has a kind of aristocratic look, like you find in the paintings of Velazquez".[238] The appearance of Lauren, like Dorothea, is otherworldly and timeless.

I conclude that the ability of Hicks and Lux to combine truths and falsehoods in their hyperreal portrayals create visual uncertainty with the effects all the more alluring or disturbing to the viewer. This ambiguity encourages the viewer to look beneath the surface of the images for meaning about beauty and perfection in contemporary society.

Although mimesis is not foremost in Hicks' work, she does succumb to the traditions of portraiture when portraying the likeness of the subject in a formal portrait. One example, is the 2008 commissioned portrait of Australian champion surfer Layne Beachley that exudes a quiet confidence in herself and her achievements.

[238]Leo Benedictus, interview with Loretta Lux, *The Guardian*, 23 November 2006, www.theguardian.com.uk.

Moments of truth

Digital imaging further offers portrait artists the creative possibilities of moving beyond mimesis in favour of constructed moments of truth in pictorial narratives. Artists use storytelling as a way to represent their lived experience or the lives of others, and to comment on social attitudes and beliefs that are a part of the collective consciousness. They may engage with memory or offer more oblique references to past events by way of photographs, film stills, videos and digital imaging. Tracey Moffatt is one artist who stages images to create artful and unsettling narratives about race relations, cultural identity and social stereotypes in imagined scenarios. She manufactures moments of truth by toying with perceptions of the past and the present. Moffatt says, "I am not concerned with verisimilitude … I am not concerned with capturing reality, I'm concerned with creating it myself".[239] To achieve this, she stages artifice with elements of truth, as a constructed reality in her photographed painted tableaux. Her pictorial narratives are concentrated into either single scenes or series that accumulate meaning across a range of images and media. She mixes the past, present and alludes to the future in the plot, using metaphors and storyline sequences. Early in her career, she was influenced by film maker Nicholas Roeg who used disjointed ambiguous plots. Moffatt exhibited her latest staged-fictions in film works at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017.

It is important to note here that the *tableau* is an historical device of pictorial realism that involves narrative. It has its precedence in figurative painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which audiences relied on symbols and characters to tell a story in a choreographed scene. Contemporary artists, like Moffatt, use the pictorial tableau as a platform for voicing their views on cultural and political issues facing Australian society.

Moffatt is recognised internationally for her series of photographs and short films that are seen as semi-autobiographical portrayals of her lived experience because they are referenced in part to the artist's own life. She acts as model for

[239] Blair French and Daniel Palmer, *Twelve Australian Photo Artists*, 113.

her work. Alongside other renowned Indigenous contemporary photographers, including Foley, Deacon, Siwes and Maynard whose work was explored in Chapter Two of this thesis, Moffatt also rose to prominence in the late twentieth century by addressing cultural and social stereotypes of Indigenous Australians in her art practice. While her contemporaries have continued to be identified by their Aboriginality, Moffatt has resisted being labelled according to her Indigenous ethnicity. She has deliberately sought recognition for the 'universality' of her work which comments on global social and political issues facing women and Indigenous people, not only in Australia. Marianne Riphagen says one of the best known exchanges about ethnic categorisation occurred between Moffat and curator Clare Williamson in which Moffatt declined to participate in an exhibition of photo-based art that concerned issues of marginalisation and identity politics in 1992.

Moffatt's pointed reply to Williamson's communication states:

> I have never been a mere social issues type artist in fact my work has never been BLACK. (if there is such a definition). I have made a point of staying out of all black or 'other' shows. … I want to be exhibited in Contemporary Art Spaces and not necessarily always bunched together with other artists who make careers out of 'finding themselves–looking for their identities'!! [240]

Even so, Riphagen comments the characterisation of artists' works and artistic identities as Aboriginal has persisted in Australia which makes it difficult for an Indigenous artist to shake off the label of an Indigenous artist. This could be further complicated by audiences assuming that Aboriginal artists would primarily deal with Indigenous cultural and social issues, and/or exhibit at shows exclusively dedicated to Indigenous artists. This highlights the dilemma of ethnic categorisation for Indigenous artists and cultural institutions.

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[240] Marianne Riphagen, "Contested Categories: Brook Andrew, Christian Thompson and the Framing of Contemporary Australian Art," *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 55 (2013): 94. Clare Williamson was the curator of the Institute of Modern Art exhibition *Who Do You Take Me For?* in Brisbane in 1992 that Moffatt stated her opposition to participate in.

While increasingly surveys of contemporary art include Aboriginal works alongside those of other ethnic groups, history has shown the tendency to exhibit historical and contemporary Aboriginal art with a polemic and political intent by the art establishment. This is evident in the major survey triennials of Indigenous art at the NGA since the 2000s, and Aboriginal art exhibition *Frontier Wars* at the NGV in 2018.

Christian Bumbarra Thompson came to prominence as an artist who actively promotes his Aboriginality, and like Moffat he wants to be judged by his creative work than be known as an 'Indigenous' artist only distinguished by his race.[241] Although regarded by some cultural commentators as the 'new Tracey Moffatt', Thompson resists such a label seeking international success for his art practice. Thompson takes pride in his work as being a cosmopolitan voice in 'real time' on the international stage about his cultural identity, whereas Moffatt portrays herself as an international photo-artist, not categorised by her ethnicity.

Figure 66: Tracey Moffatt, *Something More #1*, 1989

Her early works were more documentary in style with a hint of melodrama. They were undeniably political and personal in which she spoke of the dichotomy of hopelessness and longing for a better life. This is evident in her enigmatic series *Something More* (1989) composed of nine staged photographs (six colour, three black and white) that give the impression of film stills cut from a movie. Set against painted artificial back drops, Moffatt places herself in the centre of the constructed narrative as the main protagonist. In *Something More*

[241] Artist talk at the Australian National University on 15 November 2017.

#1 (figure 66), Moffatt dressed in a slashed satin red and black cheongsam with red lipstick and nail polish, presents herself as both the victim and heroine in her quest for a new life and identity. The constructed backdrop of white billowing clouds floating above an inhospitable hot dry land, discarded car parts and wooden shack symbolise the harsh living conditions and hopelessness of her plight. She is accompanied by stereotypical characters of her depraved world: the smirking alcoholic father, the lascivious blond whore, jeering youths, and her Asian boyfriend who is desperate for her to stay. As the protagonist, she is looking to the future, longing for a better world in the city away from the sleaze and drudgery of remote outback settlements in Australia. In a black and white image *Something More #9* (figure 68), the protagonist escapes seeking 'something more' but ends up dead on the side of the road three hundred miles from Brisbane. This event has occurred after a bizarre sexual encounter at the hands of a sadistic woman 'bikie' seen wearing red nail polish, long black polished boots and wielding a whip, with Moffatt's character the fugitive crouched in the background, as shown at figure 67. Daniel Palmer rightly observes the paradox of Moffatt as (victim and) heroine of this narrative, remarking "But as if to thwart efforts to read the images for an autobiographical element, Moffatt for a moment appears to disclose herself, but only to present another—in this case as an enigmatic confusion of racial stereotypes".[242]

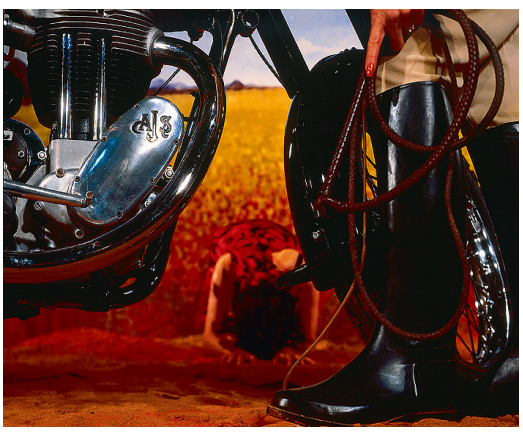

Figure 67, Tracey Moffatt, *Something More #8*, 1989

Figure 68, Tracey Moffatt, *Something More #9*, 1989

[242] French and Palmer, *Twelve Australian Photo Artists*, 105.

The narrative of this work also refers to the brutality and sadomasochism of the law, affirmed in the bolded *S* and *M* of the title, race relations and class stereotypes but with a twist. Judy Annear says the work "can be read equally as a post-modern pastiche or a post–colonial narrative where a mixed race girl escapes her destiny of poverty in the lawless countryside …"[243] This series reminds audiences of Moffatt's early beginnings in life brought up in a non-Indigenous family and her frustrated aspirations to seek a better life for herself. In a mix of artifice and reality, the moments of truth in a fabricated world of caricatures and painted backdrops in a studio setting can be likened to a B-grade movie set rich in melodrama and imagery of violence and racism. The bold rich red and ochre yellow palette heightens the visceral impact of the imagery. This series set the tone for much of Moffatt's subsequent works of constructed scenarios with visual theatricality that challenge portraiture traditions of likeness and authenticity.

Other works in her oeuvre continue the theme of race relations with a mix of personal memories and constructed narratives. The short film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989) about the relationship between an ailing white mother and an Aboriginal daughter could be regarded as a self-portrait. Moffatt has acknowledged this film was based on the strained relationship with her own adopted mother.[244] A feature-length art-house film *Bedevil* (1993) is a tale of adults haunted by their childhood memories, loss and displacement. The series of works *First Jobs* (2008) reflects on the mundane part-time jobs (waitressing, packaging meat and fruit) that Moffatt endured as young Aboriginal woman. Moreover, in her *Adventure Series* (2004) a comic-style spoof of action figures infused with humour, Moffatt plays a captured nurse, tied and bound by a male pilot, that is reminiscent of the racial tension and violence expressed in the *Something More* series cast fifteen years earlier. Joanna Gilmour comments:

> Moffatt has since perfected the explorations of the camera's capacity for artifice, her great and sometimes wicked skill in

[243] Judy Annear, 'Be Careful What You Wish For!–The Art of Tracey Moffatt', *Tracey Moffatt*, (City Gallery: Wellington)2002: 11.
[244] Blair French and Daniel Palmer, *Twelve Australian Photo Artists*, Sydney: Piper Press, 2009: 105.

> manufacturing 'truths', appropriating pop culture modes and in mimicking historic, outmoded or seldom-used photographic processes and styles has seen her heralded as a leading exponent of postmodernism.[245]

Like Moffatt, Christian Thompson impersonates identities to tackle racial stereotyping using his face and body as his primary medium. He adopts various personas created with disguises, adornments and costumes from nature, history and cultural traditions. In a conversation with Hetti Perkins in 2007, Thompson explains his work is a platform for not only his own voice, that is, a critique of his own identity but also a collective voice to contribute to the contemporary conversation about Indigenous cultural identity for all Aboriginal people.[246] In doing so, he surprises, amuses and confronts his audiences with the complexities of the identities he portrays in his photographic imagery and live performances.

Thompson is a multi-disciplinary artist working across different media. Following his formal art training in sculpture, he moved into photography, followed by video and live performance as a result of his training at DAS Arts in the Netherlands. More recently, he began writing and singing his own songs. He is a performer acting out his ideas in front of the camera or a live audience, and he does not see himself as a photographer.[247] He identifies as Indigenous, although his art practice like his life transcends cultural boundaries: his mother is of Dutch background and his father is from the Indigenous Bidjara clan in Barcaldine in Central-Western Queensland. As an emerging artist Thompson came to public attention in the mid–2000s, since then, he has had a meteoric rise in public consciousness with exhibitions in cities around the globe showcasing his oeuvre. Important series of works include *Emotional Striptease* (2003), a reworking of colonial photographs of Indigenous people wearing Victorian clothing in a contemporary way; *Graffiti* (2008) with Thompson's face obscured or adorned with headpieces of various native flora: kangaroo paw, wattle, eucalyptus leaves and so forth; *Gates of Tambo* (2004), as well as his

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[245] Joanna Gilmour, "Home Truths", *Portrait 46* (2013): 16.
[246] Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones, ed. *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia*, (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008), 124–127.
[247] Artist talk 2017.

characterisations of Tracey Moffatt *Tracey Moffatt* (2004) and *In Search of the International Look* (2005). Moreover, while studying for his Doctorate at Oxford University during the early 2010s, Thompson considered his own spiritual journey and identity in the context of 'spiritual repatriation' about reclaiming what was taken from his ancestors during colonisation—Aboriginal cultural artifacts and photographs. He sought to heal archival images of Aboriginal people through his spiritual engagement and live performance, such as wearing the traditional *sub fusc* robes of an Oxford student with crystals in his eyes and a crystal crown, and other symbolic markers of transcultural identity in his work *Down Under World* (2012). It was also during this time that he created the works *Museum of Others* (2016) in which the eyes in photographic portraits (copies) of notable male figures in colonial history from the Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford, such as Captain James Cook, are replaced with his own eyes seen through cut-outs. Here he is challenging the historical reverence for these figures and the colonial subjugation of Indigenous people seen in ethnographic images as 'others', and historical truths with his own gaze in the present. Thompson is seen holding the portraits as masks in front of his own face, his hands and body visible against an old tree. In his most recent video work, *Berceuse* (2017) he surprises the audience by singing a lullaby in his father's Bidjara language, no music, as he gazes intently at the viewer.

In his earlier photographic series *Gates of Tambo* (2004) Thompson impersonates, inter alia, Tracey Moffatt and Andy Warhol as a homage to artists who inspired him.[248] Exploring their work aided the younger Thompson to define his creative expression within the context of global contemporary art and portraiture. In the work *Tracey Moffatt* (2004) (figure 69), Thompson in his credible impersonation of the much respected photo-artist is shown in profile, squatting on a blue carpet and holding a camera. He is dressed in black and blue clothing and wearing a black wig, the only hint of colour on his face being the red lipstick, all set against a white background. In this image he assumes the persona

[248] The *Gates of Tambo* refers to two bottle trees planted by his great uncle outside the town of Tambo that mark the old dirt highway to Brisbane. Perkins and Jones, ed. *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia*, 2008, 125.

of Moffatt in action by masking his own identity. It is as though the viewer is observing Moffatt in real time in a studio during a photo-shoot.

Figure 69, Christian Bumbarra Thompson, *Tracey Moffatt*, 2004
Figure 70, Christian Bumbarra Thompson, *Andy Warhol,* 2004

By contrast to Moffatt, mid-twentieth century artist Andy Warhol was viewed as an outsider in society for his unconventional personal behaviour and appearances often by wearing various blond and white hairpieces. In figure 70, Thompson disguises his personal identity to appear like Warhol in his work *Andy Warhol* (2004) by wearing a white wig with the hair falling across his face and combining it with the anti-social act of spitting—or does he? Anne Marsh explains Thompson spurts water like Bruce Nauman in his famous self-portrait *Fountain* (1966-67) that was inspired by Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) which adds an additional layer of meaning to his persona.[249] Even so, the work leaves the viewer in little doubt of the subject of his impersonation. Thompson's image provides an insight into the mind-set of Warhol who sought to challenge established mores of society. In the same spirit, Thompson implies not much has changed in the twenty-first century with his own theatrics and creative personas, much like Warhol was four decades earlier. Warhol was known for sourcing existing images from everyday domestic contexts (soup cans, brillo pads) and the

[249] Marsh, *Look Contemporary Australian Photography Since 1980*, 42.

cult of celebrity (portraits of Monroe, Elvis, Mao) to create his Pop–art silkscreen prints, as well as make erotic references to his sexuality in his work.

Furthermore, in the work *Lamenting the Flowers* (2012) (figure 71), Thompson shows himself wearing a white shirt, a hat of red roses and a black veil covering his face against a white background all of which suggests he is dead and dressed for his funeral. Butterflies cover his eyes, so that the viewer is unable to see into his 'black' soul. The eyes are commonly understood in the Western history of art as the windows to a person's soul. Thompson takes pride in his Aboriginality addressing the vexed issue of colonial subjugation. In 2007, he commented "My journey has been concerned with the inaccurate representation of my people and our material culture in an historical, contemporary and international context".[250] In this work, he evokes the past Western cultural understanding that Aboriginal people were a dying race as seen in ethnographic photographs of the nineteenth century. Here, he is making a statement about how Indigenous people in the colonial past were coerced into being photographed and to disclose sacred aspects of their culture for ethnographic study.

Figure 71, Christian Bumbarra Thompson, *Lamenting the Flowers*, 2012
Figure 72, Christian Bumbarra Thompson, *On Becoming,* 2015

[250] Deborah Clark and Susan Jenkins, *Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2007), 161.

More recently in his art practice, he considers the notion of self-hood and racial difference, as shown in *On Becoming* (2015) (figure 72). In this self-portrait, Thompson conceals his Western identity with his hands decorated in Aboriginal ancestral cross-hatching that emphasises his Indigenous heritage. With dramatic effect, the artist is again seen wearing a white shirt but in this work he places himself against a black background, wearing red and yellow native flowers around his head, being the colours of the Aboriginal flag. In constructing the image, however, Thompson is acknowledging that he is a product of two different cultures, as represented by his physical self and cultural spirituality. Jane Raffan states, "Thompson's self-portraits with headdresses of native flowers … reflect the artist's approach to Indigenous culture as something 'hybrid, living and contemporary' and serve as a commentary on his personal identity …"[251] Thus, in this work he addresses cultural hybridity and the emotions of both belonging and not belonging to two cultures.

Figure 73: Tracey Moffatt, *Self-portrait*, 1999,
Figure 75: Christian Bumbarra Thompson, *In Search of the International Look*, 2005

By contrast, *Self-portrait* (1999) (figure 73) is the only 'formal' self-portrait in Tracey Moffatt's oeuvre. She presents a digital image of her professional self as a

[251] Jane Raffan, "The 'I' in Indigenous Art", *Portrait 46* (2013): 24.

glamorous lone adventure photographer. She wears a beige shirt, black trousers and has a patterned scarf around her head. To enhance her celebrity image, she wears pink lipstick and nail polish, earrings and dark sunglasses. The hand coloured self-portrait shows Moffatt ready to take a photo with an analogue SLR camera in hand and contemplating her field of vision beyond the viewer with whom she does not engage. The reflection in her sunglasses and camera lens of red and black does not correlate with the surrounding landscape of soft blue, purple and yellow that suggests a studio setting.

Notably, Thompson continues his characterisation of Moffatt in his work *In Search of the International Look* (2005) (figure 74) which references her self-portrait (figure 73). Thompson stages his persona not in the desert during the day but in the city, with the Brisbane river and golden sunset situated behind him. Like Moffatt in the original portrait, Thompson looks pensively beyond the frame of the photograph holding a SLR camera to his chest and wears a patterned head scarf (over a dark wig), earrings, red lipstick and nail polish, rose not dark sunglasses and a 'lurex' beige singlet rather than a shirt. His manliness is evident through his face, chest and arm hair. His persona could be viewed simply as a playful response to Moffatt's international success and perceptions in the art world that he is indeed the 'new Tracey Moffat', however, I argue there is more to this image about Thompson as a construct of his personal and cultural identity than a mere homage to Moffatt. His parody of Moffatt and the way he positions his portrait in the landscape offer insights into his desire for success and recognition of his individual creative expression, not as a subaltern of Moffatt, and his Aboriginality. As the title of the work suggests, Thompson seeks success as an international artist by creating his own 'international look' through his many personas and guises in a dialogue about Indigenous recognition, gender and cultural inequality. Furthermore, he shows himself as an urban-based Indigenous artist sited on traditional lands once occupied by Indigenous ancestors, thereby expressing his spiritual connection to country.

Moreover, how Moffatt manufactures artifice is further revealed in a 2005 diptych print taken of the *Self-portrait* (1999/2005) (figure 75) at the photo shoot. The alternate self-portrait is a black and white print on which Moffatt has

written detailed instructions to her editor on how to fashion the portrait to present the best image of herself as a glamourous star photographer to the viewer that sits alongside the painted final enhanced self-portrait.

Figure 75: Tracey Moffatt, *Self-portrait*, 1999/2005

Through these works, Moffatt affirms she does not simply record a moment in time or reproduce a likeness, rather she constructs meanings, whether real or illusionary, in staged settings. Similarly, there is much theatricality and contrivance in Thompson's work. He uses his face and body as a medium to deconstruct racial stereotypes by adopting different personas and using various media. While Moffatt's earlier role plays can be regarded as self-portraits that incorporate aspects of her lived experiences as a young Indigenous woman, her latter work has meanings of more global significance, whereas Thompson's impersonations parody the duality of his cultural and personal identity.

Other contemporary artists look to art history to create contemporary illusions of truth in portraiture. Zahalka and Rae are two such artists who recall the style of Dutch masters of the seventeenth century through the placement of people and objects to create a modern narrative. Their works are not an homage to the Dutch painters but rather an acknowledgement of the formal structures of an art historical period adopted by them. Zahalka affirms this saying, "So, I position

people and objects in my images resembling the formal aesthetic conventions of these [Dutch] paintings to tell my own story".[252]

As shown in Chapter Two, Zahalka appropriates familiar images from the past and reconstructs them with an assemblage of old and modern accoutrements to create new meanings in the present (figure 2). The series *Resemblance* (1987) was produced using models during a residency in Berlin and the latter series *Resemblance 2* (1988) shows friends and family posing in Australian modern interiors with Vermeer overtones. In other work from these series, *The Card Players* (1987) captures a moment in time, as though the men were asked instantly to pose for the camera, surrounded by bread, eggs, fruit and vegetables strewn over a table covered by a white cloth and a rug in an arranged period still-life. The two men, however, sit at the table dressed in modern clothing, a lens rests behind a glass of beer that reflects the artist, the other a glass of red wine, and the candle hints at a night card game. In the background, a period painting hangs on the wall in contrast to two contemporary works on the floor. Whereas, *The Cleaner* (1987) is a period recreation using black and white tiles, purple and gold drapes, fruit and vegetables in a bowl on the farmhouse table with some cut ready to eat, and a painting by Holbein on the wall. The bucket on the floor immediately compromises the veracity of the image. The cleaner sits at the table dressed in everyday clothing but is wearing modern headphones to a Sony Walkman considered an outdated technology today. The people appear decidedly out of place in these quasi-period reconstructions. Here, Zahalka has created interiors to tell a story about the contrivances and artificiality of modern day life using conventional compositions. She adopts the formal aesthetic conventions of old Dutch paintings with a mix of objects, both old and new.

Like Zahalka, Rae draws on the technical mastery of placement, light and space of the old Dutch vanitas painters, notably Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch and Gabriel Metsu in her interiors to imbed doubt in a weave of illusion. For Rae, Dutch interiors are filled with the subject's presence and mindfulness. She explains:

[252] Interview with the artist, Appendix Eleven, 33.

> I was very conscious of, and interested in, how Vermeer used light to frame a state of mind, an interior state of mind … So the interiors are a description of someone in a state of contemplation … By placing a figure in a space as I do, and as Vermeer does, the interior space mirror states of mind or even makes certain states of mind possible.[253]

Mindfulness can have many definitions, including an excuse for self-indulgence but for this thesis, it is defined as a mindful private reflection or activity that has awareness of the present moment.

The idea of stillness of the mind and body is more evident in her portraits of friends in interior spaces than in her formal commissioned portrait works. Paton praises Rae's ability to channel Vermeer's style of the single figure interiors of the period not implicitly for its 'old masterly' look but in its placement of the figure and objects in a room of quiet mindfulness. He comments:

> Rae's paintings urge us instead to notice the *varieties* of stillness. The stillness of open forms as opposed to closed, of shadows as opposed to people. And her paintings constantly testify that the state of stillness is demanding. Not a default setting, a soft option, a refuge from more rigorous alternatives, stillness is a discipline and a test – something fought for, and with, in each painting.[254]

At the same time, Rae anchors this inward thinking to the present day with modern objects and styling. That said, she composes her interiors in much the same way as she places old and familiar everyday objects together in unfamiliar groupings in her still-lifes to create an effect of uncertainty.

In her series of calm interiors, the subjects are shown standing or seated at a table reading a letter, a newspaper or a text on a mobile phone and surrounded by a variety of objects from different eras: plastic water bottle, tea cup, books, oriental rugs and so forth. In her portrait *Large Interior 175 (Richard)* (2005) (figure 76), the subject is seen seated on an antique balloon back chair, casually

[253] Interview with the artist, Appendix Seven, 363.
[254] Justin Paton, *Jude Rae* (Auckland: Ouroborus Publishing, 2006), 12.

dressed and quietly reading the newspaper as an everyday activity in a modern room with venetian blind, conversely an oriental carpet is placed over the table. The image is juxtaposed with Vermeer undertones of a gently lit space with its muted colours that accentuates the tension between light and shadow.

Figure 76, Jude Rae, *Large Interior 175 (Richard)*, 2005
Figure 77, Jude Rae, *Large Interior 174 (David),* 2005

In another portrait, *Large Interior 174 (David)* (2005) (figure 77), a man is similarly seated at a table covered with an oriental rug and books placed upon it but he is quietly looking at a mobile phone in his hand, reading, texting or searching the internet. Strangely out of place in the corner of the room is an outdated overhead projector on top of a cabinet. Through her contrived moments of truthfulness, Rae is tempting the viewer to reflect upon the modern day constraints placed on private reflection with the preponderance of smart-phones, the internet and social networking sites in a world of instant communication. Paton substantiates this commenting, "By echoing Vermeer's space in the twenty-first century, Rae invites us to wonder about the value—even the possibility—of that kind of reflection today".[255]

Thus, Rae's paintings are more than simple depictions of unlikely objects and subjects together in interior spaces, they are studies of perceptual uncertainty,

[255] Paton, *Jude Rae*, 88.

illusionistic living spaces in the twenty-first century. She prompts the viewer to look more closely, beneath the surface and to question assumptions first formed upon encountering her images, no matter how strange or incongruous the vision is before them. One of the more overt displays of her illusory interiors is observed in figure 78. Here Rae is seen in her studio with her award-winning portrait *Large Interior (Micky Allan) (2005)* on the wall behind her.[256]

Figure 78, Jude Rae, *Large Interior (Micky Allan)*, 2005

In what could be regarded as a private moment, a quiet state of mindfulness or contemplation, the subject is observed alone and calmly sitting at a table with her hands folded in front of her. Sunlight is falling on her face as she looks out the window enjoying an unseen view and undistracted by the viewer's gaze. The subdued earthy colours add to the mood of quiet mindfulness. A tea cup and book is placed on the table which is also covered in an oriental rug and in the corner of the room sits a multitude of new and old objects. The constructed interiors are built from things around her studio, her belongings and other people's things to create a vision. Another oriental rug is draped behind the figure that hints at Rae's earlier works with draping fabrics.

She explains:

[256] Her portrait of friend and fellow artist Micky Allan won the Portia Geach Memorial Award for portraits by women artists in 2005. Rae won the Award again in 2008 with her self-portrait titled *Self-Portrait (The Year My Husband Left)*.

> The room is a corner of my studio. There is a fuse box and an overhead projector on the filing cabinet next to Micky … I am interested in the way Vermeer's interiors present, in the most neutral sense, subjects as objects. The figure is caught in the same light and space as other objects in the room. It is the infusion of that objective space with subjective presence which distinguishes Vermeer. Object and subject are held in a balance, like that which occurs between breathing out and breathing in.[257]

Looking at Rae's work in this way, it becomes clear that her paintings have a visual strangeness and contrivance much like the interiors of the old Dutch masters. Rae's portraits display a stillness, a mindfullness of the present moment but are not what they seem surrounded by incongruous objects in a staged fiction. Zahalka and Rae remind the viewer that portraiture is still governed by established conventions in contemporary representations.

A new plasticity of the human form

The human genome as an identifiable means of human identity is being challenged by some contemporary artists who create fantastical creatures that are part-human and part-animal. In her former role as curator, Vivien Gaston alluded to a new 'plasticity' of the human face (and form) visualised by new technologies in which artists manufacture not what is, an authentic human being but what could be, a fantastical identity. In doing so, she refers to the animated and unsettling amorphous humanoid forms created by artist Patricia Piccinini.[258]

Piccinini's work reflects her interest in the areas of genetics, bioethics, biotechnologies with its potential for genetic modification and cloning of both humans and animals. In the late twentieth century, humans and animals have gone from being uniquely reproduced to matter that can be artificially

[257] www.trust.com.au/portiageachmemorialaward/juderae.

[258] Since the mid 1990s, Piccinini has become one of Australia's foremost artists to create humanoid or hybrid forms. In 2003, she exhibited her works at the Venice Biennale. In 2016, an exhibition of her work in four venues in Brazil got astonishing attendance—over 1.3 Million visitors. She says for an Australian artist who no one had heard of before that was astounding … people really connected with it in a very heartfelt way. She gets that a lot, in particular from young people.

reproduced in a laboratory, thus the extraordinary becomes the ordinary with the availability of scientific research and new technology. Nevertheless, Piccinini emphasises advances in biotechnologies come with commercial imperatives, as well as moral dilemmas and ethical tensions for modern society. Helen Ennis throws light on this saying, "Piccinini rejects what she describes as the 'oppositional positioning' of nature and technology arguing that each has already been affected by the other", the natural is already artificial and vice versa.[259] In doing so, Piccinini opens the dialogue for people to think and feel about what it means to be human and animal by creating hybrid forms of improbable semblance that fall somewhere between natural and hyperreal, beautiful and abhorrent. She remarks "I make these sculptures as a catalyst for conversation … a kind of manifestation of this awareness of transformation as a culture, a change in culture".[260]

Figure 79: Patricia Piccinini, *First Satisfied Customer, the Mutant Genome Project*, 1994–95

This can be seen in an early digitally manipulated surreal self-portrait *First Satisfied Customer, the Mutant Genome Project* (1994-95) (figure 79). Gaston explains:

[259] Ennis, *Photography and Australia*, 124.
[260] Interview with the artist, Appendix Six, 354.

> An insane smile and bright plastic colouring, Patricia Piccinini offers up a strange creature as if it were her baby ... Maternity takes on a ghoulish guise when controlled by a toxic mix of scientific experiment and consumer values. The artist embraces the new order and portrays herself as the 'first satisfied customer' of this bizarre practice.[261]

In this self-portrait, the artist proudly smiles to the world holding her humanoid baby LUMP (*Lifeform with Unevolved Mutant Properties*) within a frame of love hearts and symbols. Piccinini's *the mutant genome project* is a parody of biotechnology and society's ambivalence towards hybrid forms created to serve the needs of humans. It comprises a series of digital photographs and installations that features LUMP, a digitally produced fictitious humanoid offspring, fashioned from dubious IVF and eugenics research.[262]

Figure 80, Patricia Piccinini, *Psychotourism*, 1996

In a further example of artifice and illusion, *Psychotourism* (1996) (figure 80), Piccinini situates a hyperreal portrayal of actor Sophie Lee against the artifice of LUMP in a spectacular virtual environment of her conceptual world. Again accompanied by its almost too perfect human mother in a new symbiosis, LUMP the disease-resistant super baby is lovable and cute, with its synthetic pink skin and pale blue eyes, is not shunned by society but is strangely bizarre. Piccinini explains the creation of LUMP "is as if an engineer and an advertising agency

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[261] Vivien Gaston, *The Naked Face: Self-Portraits*, 12.
[262] *The Oxford Dictionary* defines eugenics as "The science of improving a population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics".

redesigned a baby".[263] In this portrait, the viewer looks down on a computer-generated landscape of a shimmering river within a deep red-walled canyon, Lee stands on the rim protectively holding LUMP to her body. So why is Lee so possessive? Does the image imply Lee would rather die than give up her humanoid baby? On one hand, LUMP can be viewed as a parody of motherhood, of Piccinini's own maternal feelings, in this digitally created hyperreal world of biotechnology. On the other hand, LUMP could represent malignancy, a cancer of the flesh that Lee is unable to rid herself and the only option is death in the abyss. In a related work *Psychogeography* (1996), Piccinini shows a utopian world in which human and humanoid can live together, one that is more desirable than the known world. The landscape offers an alternative reality in which Lee points the way for her humanoid baby. In both of these images, Piccinini challenges the viewer to accept these strange mutant offspring and care for them as they do their own babies. She invites audiences to see the beauty in them and cherish them rather than revile them. She emphasises that in this technological age of bio-scientific advances, humans are responsible for any new life they create, whether it is natural or engineered.

Taking this a step further, Piccinini portrays her fantastical creatures as beautiful rather than freakish, able to co-exist with humans with the power of motherly love that lures the audience into her world of biotechnological possibilities who may otherwise find it taboo. Indeed, Madonna and Child references frequent her works as though the sculptures and hyperreal images are a portrait of her lived experience as a mother.

In order to explore the effects of motherhood on her mutant forms, I turn to the humanoid sculpture *Big Mother* (2005) (figure 81), a portrait of a nursing mother and child. The viewer may view *Big Mother* as a universal portrait of motherhood or a surrogate carer to the birth mother as a reflection of motherhood in the twenty-first century. The humanoid creature, part-human and part ape, stands slightly hunched over nursing and holding a newborn human baby tenderly in her long arms with claws evident, and with baby blue

[263] Desmond, *Present Tense,* 50.

coloured leather carry bags placed at her oversized feet. The face is almost human shown here forlorn with gentle eyes and a weary smile framed by long hair in a resigned pose to her role as nurturer. In this sculpture, Piccinini asks the audience to consider what constitutes motherhood in today's world. In response to her question, she argues "In her world, blended families are valued and loved. Sibling creatures are human and experimental combines, and they exist in peaceful cohabitation".[264]

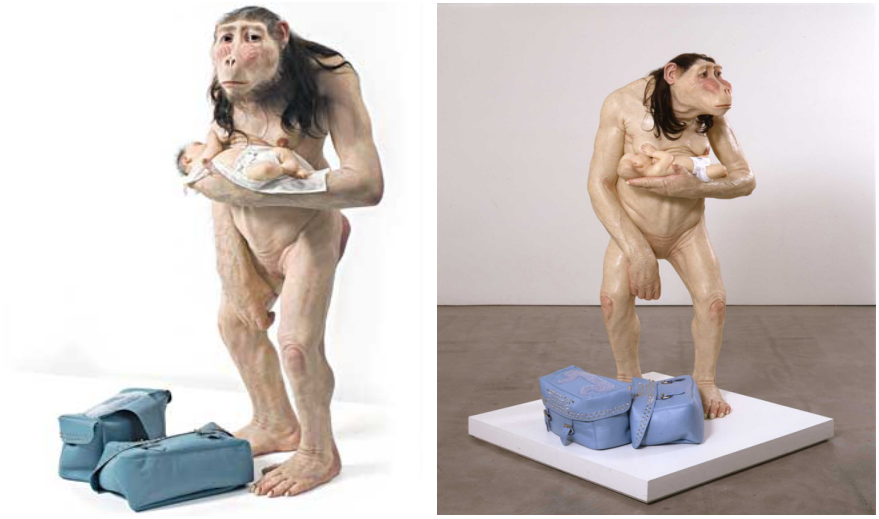

Figure 81, Patricia Piccinini, *Big Mother* (2005)

The significance of this statement is evident in *The Embrace* (2005) (figure 82), a simulation of Piccinini herself. In a strange depiction of motherhood, the mutant offspring clings to the face of its mother, aggressively craving and demanding the full attention of Piccinini who falls backward from the intensity of the encounter with her not yet socialised infant. The self-portrait is fraught with emotions in which the artist states:

> the moment when the maternal parent realised their life is now consumed by the infant's greedy need for nurture. That the 'embrace' is shown as savage and suffocating, as well as zealously affectionate demonstrated what the survival instinct requires, and the push-pull emotions that attend it.[265]

[264] Patricia Piccinini, *Relativity* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2010), 19.
[265] ibid, *Relativity*, 13.

Again, Piccinini accentuates the dilemma of motherhood and the mutability between species while at the same time recognising the innate desire of all beings to nurture and care for their offspring.

Piccinini frequently uses her own image and body as a model for her work, including when she was pregnant. This is evident in the surreal creature the *Osculating Curve* (2016) (figure 83) which has a fleshy pregnant belly with long hair that rests on one arm with six offspring with mouths to suckle milk likened to new born babies who tenderly embrace their mother. To osculate is to kiss, says Piccinini. She explains:

> This is a pregnant form and here is an arm and here is the progeny of this form, the offspring and they are on top of her and of course she is a kind of mutant and a monster, an aberration. At the same time, what she embodies is a sense of fecundity and a kind of portrayal of fertility. She is pregnant.[266]

The work has personal significance for the artist who has experienced the emotional challenges of fertility by participating in the IVF program. It reflects her concerns about fertility and reproduction, and of being a woman.

Figure 82, Patricia Piccinini, *The Embrace*, 2005
Figure 83, Patricia Piccinini, Osculating Curve, 2016

[266] Interview with the artist, Appendix Six, 349.

Piccinini also asks audiences to consider the ethics and perils of human cloning. The work *Game Boys Advanced* (2002) (figure 84) shows pre-teen boys fixated on a hand-held games console. The hyperreal sculpture of silicone, polyurethane and human hair suggest two identical young boys, Ollie and Solly are clones, one boy looks over the shoulder of the other boy, watching him play his game. At first glance, all aspects of their appearance (hairstyles, track pants, T-shirts, sweat shirts and runners) and behaviour appear to be unremarkable until the viewer looks more closely at their faces and hands which have prematurely aged to resemble that of old men. The boys' wrinkled slack hairy skin contrasts to what the viewer would expect of pre-adolescent boys with fresh faced smooth pink skin, thus creating a sense of alarm and concern about the effects of some medical or genetic abnormality. The boys are engrossed in the game, unaware of their plight of biological maturation and their sympathetic audience. The audience may consider the work a response to the highly media publicised cloning in 1997 of the Scottish sheep 'Dolly' and her early onset of arthritis, subsequent accelerated ageing and premature death. This being the case, here Piccinini highlights the fascination of unravelling the human genome and the possible effects of human cloning whether deliberate, misused or abused.

Figure 84, Patricia Piccinini, *Game Boys Advanced*, 2002

Moreover, her sculptural hybrid forms show sympathy to the hyperreal works of other notable Australians artists Ron Mueck and Sam Jinks in scale, illusion and human traits. Like Piccinini, these two artists demonstrate their amorphous forms are not beyond the realm of possibility. The fantastical and surreal works of these three artists featured with those of other acclaimed international artists in a major exhibition *Hyper Real* at the National Gallery of Australia in 2017. Seven of Piccinini's hybrid creatures were featured, including the recent work *Bootflower and Meadow* (2016) (figure 85) also viewed in the artist's studio. Consistent with her fascination of the human genome and fecundity, this work is about the enchantment of reproduction but also the idea of genetic modification, how humans can connect with plant species and objects, in a post humanist way. A round female torso giving birth to eggs is conflated with an inanimate object, in this case a boot with a flower protruding from it that rests on a head of hair, and sits naked on a pallet of wood boards in an infinite field of purple stamen–like sculptures. Audiences may wonder at the possibilities of this new life form, a creature simultaneously familiar and alien, contentious and captivating.

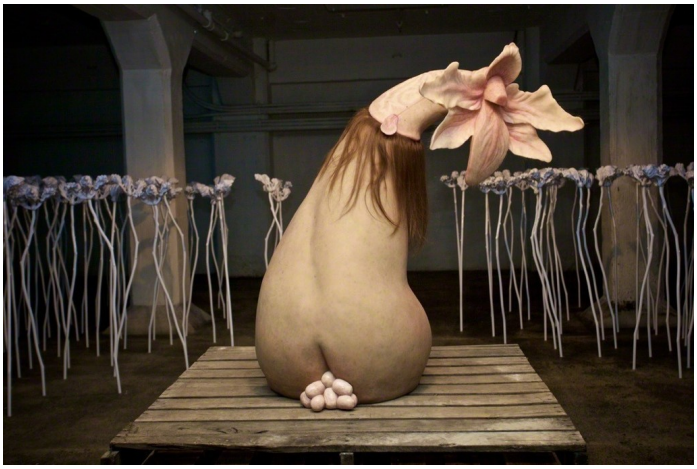

Figure 85, Patricia Piccinini, *Bootflower* and *Meadow*, 2015

Piccinini has persisted with this type of hyperreal imagery that features fantastical creatures in material form and photography. To create her amorphous forms, she directs a specialist team of scientists, fabricators and detailers who assist in producing works made from various materials aided by digital technology, photographs, drawings and videos. In her portrayals of life, Piccinini demonstrates how hyperreal imagery can make the aberrant palatable,

even desirable, as she tantalises audiences with her artificial amorphous forms juxtaposed with the human form in unsettling symbioses. The distinction between mimesis and hyperreality is especially pertinent to this thesis.

The public's fascination with hyperrealism is clearly evident, as audiences become transfixed by what they see before them, rational thought and logical thinking is abandoned for the abnormal and the strange. Hyperrealism is not new but continues to fascinate audiences becoming a popular genre worldwide as it moves from photographs, sculptures to the digital realm. The 360-degree digital video *Inverso Mundus* (2015) by the Russian collective AES+F shown in a vast scale circular room at *Hyper Real* 2017 exhibition turns the world as we know it upside down—the poor overthrow the rich, women dominate men, the young wrestle authority from the old, and animals usurp humans. Over forty minutes the audience becomes enthralled as it witnesses a parade of humans and fantastical creatures performing together in slow motion to sound but there are no voices, in a world of full of lattice space ships and virtual buildings that is beyond real life.[267]

Others may view such digital interventions and their aesthetic implications as experimental, refusing to see beyond traditional modes of thinking about portraiture. New media, however, represents a shift in the way artists view verisimilitude in portraiture today with journeys into hyperreality, moments of truth as illusions of reality and a new plasticity of the human form that confounds what is meant to be human in the twenty-first century.

In the next chapter, I explore how self-portraits offer artists an opportunity to move beyond likeness through metaphor and masquerade as an alternative representation of self-hood. I consider those self-portraits where mimesis is a secondary feature in the expression of personal identity.

[267] *Hyper Real*, National Gallery of Australia, October 2017.

CHAPTER FIVE: PORTRAITS OF THE SELF AS METAPHORS AND MASQUERADES

For the artist, the self-portrait can be a catalyst for subjective fantasy or an honest appraisal of the self, as a defining expression of selfhood. The artist may desire to create a truthful likeness or render a fictional image as an ideal presence of their physical, emotional or spiritual self. It can be argued that the self-portrait is a ready form of self-expression, promotion and indeed deception.

In this context, self-portraits may have the allure of a private diary, an autobiographical narrative that gives the viewer an 'imagined' insight into the artist self but how much of the self is the artist really willing to bare to the viewer? Is the artist motivated by a sense of artistic worth to create a self-image worthy of their social status and professional standing in the contemporary art world? Is the self-portrait a means of social commentary? These are some of the questions I consider in exploring how artists make meaning of self-hood and gender difference in contemporary self-portraits.

The role that self-exploration and self-realisation plays in the complex relationship between how artists see themselves and how they represent themselves in a self-portrait is explained by Ernst Rebel, "Self-portraits are testimonials in which the artist's ego as his own model and motif at the same time relates to other people. Artists depict themselves as they want to be seen by others, but also as they want to distinguish themselves from them".[268] This highlights that the self-portrait is fashioned by the artist in the act of portrayal, as both creator and subject. In doing so, self-portraits operate differently from

[268] Ernst Rebel, *Self-portraits*, 6.

other forms of portraiture because they merge both the artist and sitter into one. West also remarks:

> A self-portrait involves an artist objectifying their own body and creating a 'double' of themselves. Artists could use the self-portrait as a means of drawing attention to the medium and the process of production of the work, to show off their skill, or to experiment with technique or style. The viewer of a self-portrait also occupies a strange position of looking at a metaphorical mirror that reflects back not themselves but the artist who produced the portrait. Viewing a self-portrait can therefore involve the sense of stepping into the artist's shoes. These qualities make self-portraits both compelling and elusive.[269]

It is clear from the remarks of Rebel and West that many factors are at play in the creation of a self-portrait, no less the impact of the mirror image. So what does the artist see when they look at their face and body in a mirror? Do they see a false mirror reflection, as an illusion of the mind, or an image that is more true to their likeness? Brilliant quite rightly states a mirror image gives a false impression of oneself compared to how the self would appear to another person who is looking at the person in real life, in a photograph or portrait. '

> The distortion rarely disturbs us, because we are so used to making the adjustment when we see the right side of our face on the right side of the opposing image. For this reason, our mirrored reflection seems to be distorted, separating the image of myself to me from the image of myself to others. How strange it is that the 'I' that I see in the mirror opposite may be less true to my actual appearance – my face to the world – than the 'You' that you see and know at sight.[270]

A reflection of the self provides endless fascination and by implication the mirror makes a narcissus of all people by liberating the subjective, irrational and imagined self in the mind of the person. Hence, the mirror is a looking glass that

[269] West, *Portraiture*, 165.
[270] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 146.

not only reflects an image of oneself that began with scrutiny in infancy but is also a catalyst for fantasy. Nevertheless, self-portraiture always makes a concentrated autobiographical statement as the manifesto of an artist's introspection".[271]

Self-portraiture has occupied a significant place in the Western canon. As art history shows, self-portraiture within an artist's oeuvre was not uncommon in classical antiquity but flourished during the Renaissance period. In Europe, the self-portrait rose in popularity and importance as artists began to glorify their own image as a symbol of artistic expression and independence. Incorporating their own image into their work, whether surreptitiously or openly, this enabled artists to demonstrate their individual creativity and market their skills to a broader audience beyond the needs of patrons or artists' workshops. They were able to enhance their artistic worth, as well as achieve potential lasting recognition and fame. This is evident in the commissioned painting *Procession of the Magi* (1459) of the Medici family in which the head of the artist Benozzo Gozzoli is clearly seen in the middle of the painting wearing a red cap with the inscription 'opus Benotii', meaning the work of Benozzo, and glancing toward the viewer among a sea of faces.[272] Here, Benozzo asserts himself as the artist and individuality as a member of Florentine society. Importantly, artists emerged from being solely craftsmen or painters and elevated to members of the bourgeoisie, that is, the intellectual and social elite. Thus, the self-image became increasingly an interpretative means for expressing professional skill, as well as personal identity and social status. In another example, artist Albrecht Durer informed his patrons not only of his exceptional skill as a painter but also his elevated status in society and importance as a modern cultured 'virtuoso' through portraiture. In his portrayal *Self-Portrait with Fur-Trimmed Robe* (1500), Durer crafted an image of himself as a man of physical perfection and artistic genius. Importantly, the act of looking at his own reflection is mirrored

[271] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 158, 169.
[272] Omar Calabrese, trans. Marguerite Shore, *Artist's Self-portraits*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2006), 52–54.

in the portrait in which he portrays himself as his own ego-ideal, that is, created in the image of God. Rebel further explains:

> No artist's self-portrait in the art of the early modern period addresses us more solemnly, more portentously, than Durer's life-size image painted in 1500. No other work unites so demonstratively proudly, and at the same time so modestly, all the maxims of piety and artistic reflection that held sway as the 15th century passed into the 16th … is the transformation of the artist's own appearance as seen in the mirror into the idealized image of Jesus Christ.[273]

Thus, Durer's commemoration of his physical likeness with that of the creator carried the power of divine artistic creativity.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, self-portraits expanded the theatre of the self and the burgeoning ambition for recognition of skill, and with it the means by which women could assert their professional artistic and intellectual status, remarks Vivien Gaston.[274] Women's artistic endeavors, however, remained constrained by social class and gender for the preservation of male patriarchy which separated women's art and portraiture from mainstream art history. Notably, up until the early twentieth century social expectations of women, meant that female artists favoured decorative arts and crafts, still-life compositions and portraiture because ideologies of femininity and women's virtue were confined to the private and domestic sphere, not the public realm of male privilege and power in Western society. Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin's study of women artists over four hundred years (1550–1950) revealed autobiography and self-portraiture were the means common to women artists to express on canvas their womanhood and domestic lives.[275] Parker and Pollock in their history of women's art record that Victorian ideals of femininity and the rigid division of gender roles in society limited the specificity of women's art to

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[273] Rebel, *Self-portraits*, 30.
[274] Gaston, *The Naked Face: Self-portraits*, 11.
[275] Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists 1500-1950* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1979), 11–15.

an extension of the home within which women were socially confined on account of their sex.[276] Women were isolated from established art structures, notably the academies and nude figure painting/sculpture considered the highest of artistic genres since the Renaissance.

> The simple fact of women's exclusion from studying the nude constrained many of them to practice exclusively in the genres of portraiture and still life, genres considered within the Academic canon of art, less significant. By association, the women who practised in the so-called 'lesser' genres were themselves devalued, considered artists of 'lesser' talent [to men].[277]

Thus, the ideological, social and economic effects of sexual difference in patriarchal society determined women artists generally acted from a different place within society than men.

Importantly for this thesis, a shift occurred in female subjectivity in the arts and politics over the second half of the twentieth century, with the second and third waves of feminism. During the 1960s–1980s, the female body and explicit female imagery became the primary means of feminist political activism to redress historical female gender bias.[278] The feminist art movement stemmed from women's struggles for equality and sexual difference as the primary issue in libertarian politics of the time. Placing themselves as the subject of their art, feminist artists were able to take control of the appropriation of the female image and oppression of female sexuality. Whitney Chadwick argues:

> Every woman who paints a self-portrait, or sculpts a likeness, or places herself in front of the lens of a camera whose shutter she controls, challenges in some way the complex relationship that exists between masculine agency and feminine possibility in

[276] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 9,
[277] Parker and Pollock, 35
[278] Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *Art Bulletin* 69:3 (September 1987): 344.

> Western art history … towards the elaboration of a sexualized subjective female identity.[279]

Millner and her colleagues critically reviewed historic assumptions and current practice in a study on art and feminism in the twenty-first century. They argue feminist artists helped to forge the transition from modernist to postmodernist cultural strategies because they rebuked the idea that art was separate from society, beyond politics and power. Feminist artists insisted on the centrality of the body and female subjective experience in all social formations and creativity to redress the historical subordination of women, the representation of the naked (female) nude and sexualised imagery. They communicated their messages to broader audiences with indomitable spirit through video, performance, interventions in public space, photography and self-portraiture.[280]

The late 1980s and early 1990s is regarded as post-feminism or postmodern feminism in which female artists sought to de-politicise feminist art practice through new cultural meanings. Younger women artists questioned whether their art work constituted feminist aesthetics or referenced a feminist sensibility. It is especially important to note here that feminist art became viewed as part of history and no longer fashionable, and yet it was not feminism and feminist art that was past but one historical phase of feminist politics and artistic expression. Millner et al suggest that "the tools of feminist critique are still yielding valuable new insights, both about historical and contemporary art, while simultaneously providing sources of strength to combat the effects of ongoing social and institutional misogyny".[281]

Post-feminist artists from the 1990s to 2010s are refiguring perceptions of female sexuality that is giving rise to new ways of seeing selfhood and the representation of the female form in visual culture. While women artists may embrace the feminist legacy of combating the negative effects of misogyny in innovative ways in their contemporary art practices, there is neither one

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[279] Whitney Chadwick, "How Do I look", in *Mirror: Self-portraits by Women Artists*, ed. Liz Rideal, (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2001), 9.
[280] Jacqueline Millner et al, 143.
[281] Jacqueline Millner et al, 148

privileged strategy of engagement nor a definitive generational shift towards a new phase of feminism. Nevertheless, there is interest in what Anne Marsh calls 'intersectional feminism' that seeks to embrace the power of feminism and build on its values and achievements on many fronts—race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality difference in the twenty-first century.[282]

Building on from the last chapter, I argue the self-portrait is an important medium of self-representation for women artists to overcome stereotyping of the female face and body in contemporary society. In this chapter, I examine how contemporary self-portraits offer the artist the opportunity to move beyond likeness to create fantasy expressions of the self through metaphor and masquerade.

The chapter is divided into two parts.

In the first part, I examine the self-portrait as a metaphor, a symbolic narrative of the artist self. I show how artists Adrienne Doig and Tim Storrier reveal the self in humorous and surprising ways that challenge conventional ideas about mimesis in portraiture. In the second part, I explore how women artists create masquerades and dreamscapes as veiled expressions of the self in which fantasy and reality become curiously interchangeable. I begin by examining the allegories of motherhood and female sexuality by Del Kathryn Barton in her dreamlike imagery. Barton expresses a feminist sense of selfhood in how she interprets her emotions, desires and sexuality as a woman, mother and artist. Building on her erotic imagery, I then consider how Annette Bezor and Wendy Sharpe further challenge historical notions of female beauty and sexuality in their provocative and candid expressions of the female face and body. I contend these women artists consciously renegotiate the presence of the naked self and female body from object to subject in their self-portraits, thereby opposing oppressive acts of the male gaze.

[282] Ann Marsh "Positioning Feminism," *Art Link* 37:4 (December 2017), 8-21

Metaphors and the ego-ideal

Revelations of the self can be honest, lighthearted or even arbitrary in the way artists present themselves to the viewer in a self-portrait. No matter how conceptual or symbolic the depiction it expresses something of the artist. It could be argued the self-portrait as a metaphor suggests a poetic embodiment of the artist self, as an ego-ideal. Indeed, Adrienne Doig's quirky self-portraits operate as both a symbolic narrative of her life in the Blue Mountains near Sydney and an expression of her sartorial elegance as her ego-ideal.

The common perception that 'clothes maketh the woman' (or man) is the essence of how Doig represents herself in the self-portrait *My Life as a Doll* (2002) (figure 86). The work is a collection of ten miniature porcelain dolls in her likeness, shown wearing different outfits from Doig's own wardrobe of clothing. Her quintessential blond bobbed hairstyle, bright red spectacles and red lipstick frame the faces of the dolls that are dressed in clothing and accessories in the colours of black, white and red. To create this whimsical self-portrait, Doig commissioned the dolls from separate doll makers around the world found on the internet. She provided the doll makers with photographs of herself wearing various garments as a guide, and specifications for the size and shape of the dolls. Although there is a resemblance to Doig in each doll, none of the dolls looks precisely like another because each doll was made by an individual doll maker who had not communicated with other doll makers nor seen the other dolls. The doll makers were not made aware by Doig that other dolls were being produced at the same time. In the final work, the ten small dolls are placed in a clear exhibition box that resembles a fashion show.

Figure 86: Adrienne Doig, *My Life as a Doll*, 2002

This work demonstrates to the viewer that Doig has a lighthearted approach to self-expression and her art work. She affirms this by saying:

> I don't agree with the idea that what an artist does is that important. I don't want my work to appear too earnest [to the viewer]. People like to think of artists with a certain romance, they like the model of the unrestrained creative genius, whereas art practice is an ordinary, everyday activity for me.[283]

And yet, she is passionate about traditional craft arts, in particular needlework. In her art practice, Doig seeks to revive the past skills of intricate, detailed embroidery and applique as a reaffirmation of past traditions of the homemaker. Using her needlework skills, she creates a striking tableaux of drama and amusement in her self-portraits. This can be seen in the way she stitches images

[283] Anne Loxley, "Everyday Tasks and Fey Imaginings," www.penrithregionalgallery.com.au.

of herself singing, dancing, skipping and swimming onto tapestries and tea towels to celebrate her fashionable outfits and the riches of her lifestyle in the Australian landscape.

Figure 87: Adrienne Doig, *Swimming with Platypus*, 2009
Figure 88: Adrienne Doig, *Hello Birds*, 2010

Amusingly, she embroiders images of herself dressed in her favourite clothes on existing souvenir tea towels that would be considered Australian kitsch. The images of Australian fauna and flora on the tea towels offer the viewer a congenial understanding of the Australian landscape. The self-portrait *Swimming with Platypus* (2009) (figure 87) depicts Doig diving diagonally through a green watery composition that could be likened to an Australian billabong and accompanied by two native platypuses. She is wearing a bright red swimsuit and black sunglasses. This image elevates the work to something far more interesting and somewhat droll than tourist paraphernalia.[284] Similarly, the self-portrait *Hello Birds* (2010) (figure 88) suggests a hot Australian summer. The artist again proudly wears her signature pieces—red hat, red lipstick, red swimsuit and black sunglasses—set against a bright blue background that hosts three black, pink and white cockatoos. The tea towel series represent the largest

[284] "Someone to Watch Over You," *Portrait 43* (2012): 50.

body of self-portraits in her oeuvre. In other works, the artist presents herself in various poses in interiors, gardens and Australian bush scenes.

In a later series of twenty-six self-portraits, Doig transforms European landscapes into Australian bush scenes by embroidering and appliqueing images of herself, Australian birds and animals onto picturesque French Rococo tapestries. Doig sourced the vintage tapestries while on an artist residency in Paris. In this series, she again incorporates fashionable images of herself in various natural and humorous poses amid romantic bush settings with rosellas, wallabies, wombats and cockatoos sewn into the tapestries. On one hand, these images explore notions of selfhood and of belonging to her environment as an autobiographical narrative. On the other hand, they blur a sense of place in history between Europe and Australia with allusions to European art by embroidering tapestries and adding Australian symbols in the landscape. In doing so, Doig reverses the method taken by European artists in Australia during the nineteenth century of placing European symbolism in the native Australian landscape with Australian flora and fauna into visions of the French countryside.

In keeping with this, the artist weaves a narrative of her everyday life into her self-portrait, *AD In Arcadia Ego (2011)* (figure 89). She is seen standing on a cliff viewed from behind wearing a bright red hooded jacket and blue tights, as she looks out across the landscape. She is inviting the viewer into her world and to experience the environment as she does, and yet it is a French scene as opposed to the Australian bush. The image suggests a pensive and solitary figure in the landscape but the artist is unsurprisingly accompanied by laughing blue, black and white kookaburras and grey possums. In the lower right corner of the tapestry are the words AD LOCVM that mean 'AD (Adrienne Doig) is here in this place'. Doig playfully transforms Latin phrases and the artist's initials AD into the titles of her works and signature. Furthermore, Doig alludes to the works of seventeenth and nineteenth century artists Nicholas Poussin and Casper David Friedrich. In doing so, she adopts the phrase *Et in Arcadia Ego* which translates as 'Even in Arcadia, there I am', a title of Poussin's painting (1637–38) that depicts an idealised scene of shepherds in utopia. Furthermore, she replaces the ET with her own initials AD in her work. She also draws on Friedrich's widely

recognised painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) that shows a man seen from behind perched upon a precipice or rocky outcrop overlooking a valley covered in fog, with the mountains in the background.

Figure 89: Adrienne Doig, *AD In Arcadia Ego*, 2011

In the same spirit, Tim Storrier seeks to illuminate the self to the audience in a lighthearted way in his faceless self-portraits that reveal his identity through a symbolic narrative. Foremost, they raise the question of whether a visual representation without a recognisable face can be considered a portrait. Western art history has shown the viewer looks to the face to convey likeness and express the identity of the subject portrayed, as discussed in Chapter Three. Richard Brilliant affirms this viewpoint, "we are so used to recognizing people from their faces that we feel disoriented when they are absent, or delusive or otherwise insufficient". He expands on this by commenting without some prior knowledge of the subject, "a viewer would have difficulty recognizing the image as a portrait, let alone a portrait of the artist".[285] Thus, faceless portraits question a commonly held view that visible likeness informs personal, cultural and social identity and being without it conceals or erodes the understanding of the subject. In keeping with this, in her examination of Australian portraits over almost two centuries (1880–1960), curator Anne Gray also claims:

[285] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 65.

> There is a primacy to viewing faces and to face recognition which lies at the core of our fascination for portraits … this ability to recognise and respond to faces and facial expression is crucial to the dynamics of portraiture; hence our ability to read faces can be transferred to looking at faces in paintings.[286]

That said, what people see in faces comes down to their own readings and expectations of the subject. Furthermore, when an artist depicts a subject or the self without a face or an unrecognisable likeness, it forces the viewer to contemplate what the artist is expressing about the subject and consider other meanings behind the portrait. The viewer may then search the portrait for clues of identity or revelations of the artist in the symbolism.

Thus, on the surface Tim Storrier's faceless self-portraits may deny his likeness but they do not conceal his identity. They enable him to modify the idea of self-hood by revealing his personal identity through mood, posture, clothing and accoutrements, thereby eroding the validity of mimetic representation. His faceless self-portraits are a symbolic representation of self-hood, not a visual likeness of the person, that go beyond the immediacy of the self to indulge in allegory in the guise of a fictional identity. A notable example is his self-portrait that won the Archibald Prize in 2012 (figure 90) which he says is a "mythical self-portrait. It's got more to do with, in a silly way, how one views oneself'".[287] While Storrier may have taken a jocular view of himself, Grishin is less endearing in his remarks "[Storrier] has been painting these faceless self-portraits for a number of years and although he has quite a remarkable technical facility, conceptually it is very one-dimensional or, to put it differently, intellectually still born and in search of an idea".[288]

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[286] Anne Gray, *Face: Australian Portraits 1880-1960* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2010), 15.
[287] www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/Smudge and Archie2012.
[288] Sasha Grishin, "Prizes Fail to Live Up to the Hype," *Arts Review*, *The Canberra Times* on 7 April 2012: 24.

Figure 90: Tim Storrier, *The Histrionic Wayfarer (after Bosch),* 2012
Figure 91: Tim Storrier, *Moon Boy (Self-Portrait as a Young Man),* 2010

Indeed, through the power of illusion, Storrier impersonates himself as the artist explorer in *The Histrionic Wayfarer (after Bosch)* (2012)—that is, Hieronymus Bosch—which is submerged in the guise of the another, being his dog 'Smudge'. The self-portrait is a poetic embodiment of his ego-ideal as a metaphor. At first glance, the presence of a real person is overshadowed by the symbolism. It features a pith-helmeted artist explorer wearing a safari jacket and jodhpurs, long brown boots and carrying a backpack, and with glasses but no face—or is there? A second look reveals the artist's own face as a scribbled drawing on a scrap of paper seen being blown away in the wind against the blue sky at the top right corner of the painting. And yet, it is the dog sitting on a mass of artist equipment and surrounded by other paraphernalia, not the artist dressed as the gentleman explorer trekking across the vast desert outback, that identifies him. Thus, the detachment of the face from the body becomes a visual afterthought in establishing his personal identity.

Storrier explains the work has reference to the painting *Wayfarer*, painted in 1510 by Bosch where the figure is believed to be choosing a path in life or possibly the return of a prodigal son. He states:

> It also has other references, I believe, but they are rather clouded in biblical history and time... A carapace of burden is depicted clothed in the tools to sustain the intrigue of a metaphysical survey. Provisions, art materials, books, papers, bedding, compass and maps, all for the journey through the landscape of the artist's mind, accompanied by Smudge, the critic and guide of the whole enterprise.[289]

Similarly, an earlier self-portrait *Moon Boy (Self-Portrait as a Young Man) (*2010) (figure 91) evokes a poetic memory of the artist as a young man. In this work, the figure resembles a scarecrow with its suit of empty clothes, a hat, spectacles, a water cup and rifle hanging on a timber frame and without a face. On one hand, the portrait attempts to recreate a physical and emotional presence of the artist at an earlier time in his life. On the other, it depicts the fragility of human life shown in a barren landscape below an emblematic sky with the moon shining through cosmic clouds. Again, Storrier offers a poetic statement about his faceless self-portrait:

> On a nostalgic whim using memories of old lost clothes
> I painted them hanging on a structure to resemble a figure
> Arranged in ways to suggest the posture, stance and attitude
> Informed by the emotions and moods of a youthful self, long ago,
> Passed.[290]

Storrier's mysterious, poignant landscapes capture the melancholy vastness and arid beauty of the Australian outback with its limitless, nocturnal starry sky, cracked earth and endless horizon. He sees the Australian landscape as integral to understanding who he is as a person and artist in his life journey which is visually expressed as a metaphor in these two faceless self-portraits—whether regarded by audiences or critics as silly or not.

[289] www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/timstorrier.
[290] www.timstorrier.com.au.

Masquerades and dreamscapes

The art of portraying the self can be fraught. In her writing on self-portraits, Vivien Gaston claims when it is the artist's own face in a portrait, the potential for revelation is all the greater but truth can also be hidden, inscrutable behind the prevalent conventions for self-presentation, self-protection and privacy.[291] Thus, an artist may also choose to partake in a masquerade, as a veiled expression of the self.

For this thesis, I make a distinction between the self-portrait as a metaphor and that of a masquerade, the latter builds on the seductive power of illusion, a mask-like camouflage in which the subject veils or disguises his or her identity. The distinction may be slight or a more elaborate fantastical pretense of the self, depending on the extent of the artist's desire or willingness to participate in a masquerade. At the same time masquerades, like metaphors, are inseparable from the artists who create them.

Before I examine how Del Kathryn Barton, Annette Bezor and Wendy Sharpe confront modern day attitudes and anxieties about female sexuality and the female body in their sensual dreamscapes and masquerades, I further look to art history and discourse of feminism about the representation of the naked (female) nude and explicit female imagery. This provides an insight into how to respond to the visual imagery in the works of these three women artists and to interpret the personal narrative that underlies their self-portraits.

The readings of the naked nude and the naked body in art history needs some consideration. The naked nude has become an ideal presentation of the female form and beauty that was distanced from everyday reality, whereas the naked body is an expression of human sexual desires and eroticism. This was not always the case, up until the Renaissance period male nudity represented the ideal nude as the embodiment of god-like perfection, whereas naked women were regarded as sinful. Borzello remarks, "It was not until the early sixteenth

[291] Gaston, *The Naked Face: Self-portraits*, 9.

century that the ideal nude changed sex". She explains that this took place with a painting by Giorgione *The Sleeping Venus* (1510), a glorious invention of the "ideal female nude, a reclining woman, a beautiful and passive vision of perfection ... suggestively shielding her sexuality", with breasts displayed and eyes closed that allowed the viewer to gaze freely in an aura of respectability.[292] In this regard, the nude was not sexualised. Importantly, Borzello advocates the nude or naked nude is no longer considered a sanitised expression of the female body but has become sexualised with images more explicit and provocative to the viewer.[293] This occurred because patriarchial mythology shaped and constrained women's sexuality through possession of the female form that became the embodiment of the male fantasy as flesh, thereby, fracturing the female psyche.[294]

The body and female sexuality were key themes in women's art practice in the 1970s, while performance art emerged as a characteristic of women's art and feminism during the1980s and extended into the 1990s. Feminism gave women artists the confidence to boldly express their sexuality in their art and openly challenge social stereotypes of the female form in mass media. In doing so, women's erotic art enabled women to reveal the inner truth of female sexual desire and "reclaim the female body from its imprisonment in art as a beautiful, voiceless object to be judged by male spectators. One way was for women artists to use their own bodies … [to] direct the viewer's response".[295] Famous for her many masquerades in fictional film stills as a model of altered female subjectivity, renowned late twentieth century American performance–photo-artist Cindy Sherman confronted the objectification of the female body and sexuality in patriarchal society by using her own face and body image, as well as dolls, masks and prosthetics in her works. She appropriated the visual language of B–grade movies, pornography, fashion magazines and mass media. Her many guises and personas are not considered self-portraits in the conventional sense

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[292] Frances Borzello, *The Naked Nude*, 15.
[293] Borzello, *The Naked Nude*, 6–11.
[294] Fredrika Scarth, "The Second Sex: Ambiguity and the Body," *The Other Within: Ethics, Politics and the Body in Simone de Beauvoir*, Lanham, Md: Rowan & Littlefield (2004): 100–112.
[295] Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-portraits* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 167.

of a visual representation of selfhood but are constructed, conceptual portrayals of female stereotypes that refute self-revelation. Pointon affirms this by stating:

> The use by artists of their own bodies to make artworks is something of an orthodoxy from the second half of the twentieth century but the relationship of the work of Cindy Sherman … to the self-portrait is vexed insofar as it produces new and fictionalized bodies. Sherman uses her body to project impersonations for the camera that are deeply uncanny but also categorically different from a self-portrait.[296]

Importantly, through her masquerades in which she seeks to conceal aspects of herself with elaborate costume disguises of degrading female roles in society, such as the seductress, prostitute or victim, Sherman has become a signifier of the 'everywoman' in society. Even so, there are differing views about the centrality of her images whether they promote feminist ideals against a rigid male structure or perpetuate male fantasies with reductive media clichés of femininity and female beauty. I would argue Sherman deliberately subverts the male gaze by challenging prevailing stereotypes of the female body and myths about female desire by depicting women in various poses contrary to society expectations. In doing so, she evokes society's ideals of femininity as a masquerade in the mind of the viewer. Gaston remarks "[Sherman is] a magician of the self. She conjures up new identities through costume, makeup and subtle attitudes invented with distinct scenarios … identity is a masquerade of adjustments and reactions to social structure".[297] Hence, her personas are a postmodern parody of female representation in society.

In the spirit of postmodern feminism, Barton, Bezor and Sharpe explore the social politics of female sexuality through the symbolic power of the face and body in their self-portraits. The realism of female sexual desire is juxtaposed with the artifice of socially constructed female gender roles in their painted masquerades. Barton celebrates her expressions of female sexuality in her exotic dreamscapes, Bezor demonstrates the power of masking the self to fracture long-

[296] Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity*, 207.
[297] Gaston, *The Naked Face: Self Portraits*, 39.

held stereotypes of female beauty and sexuality in her series of 'big faces' and fantasy montages, whereas, Sharpe openly celebrates her sexuality in fantasies and candid voluptuous nudes that function as a spectacle of the female form.

The oeuvre of Del Kathryn Barton visualises a poetic relationship between lived experience and self-portraiture. Her intricate interwoven dreamscapes are a fictional expression of how she views her physical, emotional, spiritual self, as a woman and mother displayed through allegories of female sexuality and motherhood. Her works are a masquerade, a camouflage of the 'real' in an elaborate enchanted dream-like world in which the artist first became absorbed in her childhood that remains today in her imagination. In her allegorical self-portraits, Barton is both a model and subject of her dreamscapes. She uses a likeness of her face and body (and those of her family) in scenes of strange enchantment and desire that inhabit her imagined and real worlds. A hybrid world of humans, animals, birds and plants suggest a physical, emotional and spiritual attachment between humanity and nature. Highly illustrative and pictorially decorative, no part of the picture plane is without adornment in her intricate repetitive patterning. Her use of mixed media, including synthetic polymer paint, gouache, watercolour, pen, glitter and sequins in a kaleidoscope of vivid colour add to the multifarious nature of her oeuvre. Drawing, however remains the core of her art practice seen in the many elaborate sketches for her major works and expressionist gestures of love and physical desire with highly personalised symbolism and candid images of the human sexual organs.

Barton won the 2008 Archibald Prize for her self-portrait *You are What is Most Beautiful About Me, a Self-Portrait with Kell and Arella* (2008) (Figure 92).[298] The visceral nature of this work is evidence of her maternal love and devotion to her children. Barton sits with arms and legs splayed around her two children in a pose that can be understood as an expression of the maternal bond between mother and child. She gently holds out the arms of her son, whereas her daughter touches her leg with her hand, gestures that binds mother, son and

[298] Barton won the Archibald Prize again in 2013 for her portrait *Hugo* (2013) of actor Hugo Weaving in her trademark style cementing her status as one of Australia's major contemporary woman artists.

daughter. Large leaves, filaments of ribbons, flowers and vines weave around the figures connecting them together against a dark green landscape of fine painted dots. The protagonists are dressed in colourful modern clothing that convey an uncharacteristic vision of her present reality, as opposed to the fantasy expressions of herself. Barton looks through her red spectacles always on guard, protecting and keeping watch over her children.

Figure 92: Del Kathryn Barton, *You are What is Most Beautiful About Me, a Self-Portrait with Kell and Arella,* 2008

For Barton, her children are manifestly central to her life which is clearly evident in her explanation of meaning behind the portrait:

> This painting celebrates the love I have for my two children and how my relationship with them has radically informed and indeed transformed by understanding of who I am. The title of the work– you are what is most beautiful about me–alludes to that utterly profound 'in-liveness' that all mothers have for their children. Both my children have taken my world by storm and very little compares to the devotion I feel for them both. The intensity of this emotion is not something that I could have prepared myself for.

> The alchemy of life offered forth from my inhabitable women's body is perhaps the greatest gift of my life.[299]

It could be said that the mother and child motifs in Barton's self-portraits are an ideal manifestation of motherhood and the role of women in Western society. Iconic imagery of the Madonna and Child represents the universal concept of motherhood at the centre of all humanity, albeit meanings given to such images are historically and culturally specific. What is important about this self-portrait is that Barton celebrates on canvas her multi-faceted life as a modern woman, mother and artist. She does not convey a sense of psychological splintering between artist self and mother, of what Rachel Power calls "a divided heart", a fracturing of the self, with the fear that success of one must be at the expense of the other due to the seeming incompatibility of artist and mother.[300]

Barton's world is unashamedly rapturous, expressing the joyful ecstasy of motherhood, as a gift of selflessness, and sexual exploration through erotic imagery of the female form. The symbolic imagery of human figures surrounded by a cacophony of animals, birds and plants present a fantasy world of fecundity that can be disturbing: multi-breasted women suckle children and rabbits; birds with human breasts; nubile hermaphrodite bodies cloaked in feathers, leaves and ribbons; elaborate nature settings sprout vulvas, flowers with long, phallic stamens; tendrils of vines and serpents wind around the hands and bodies. Here we begin to understand the significance of the creative power of nature, as a sexual allegory of the female psyche, that reveals sexual fantasies and unconscious dreams in her self-portraits.

Furthermore, the ornamentation in her paintings has an innate Gothic feel with its fragile figures of earth mother goddess and childhood innocence with their enlarged doll-like faces with oversized eyes, imperious noses and small cupid mouths. Seeing is all important in her works, whether the female figure is gazing at the viewer drawing them into her bewitched world, reflecting on her inner

[299] www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2008/delkathrynbarton.
[300] Rachel Power, *The Divided Heart: Art and Motherhood* (Melbourne: Red Dog, 2008), 23.

realm or as a visionary, a seer, argues Julie Ewington.[301] The naked female form and eyes are signatory features of her oeuvre.

Figure 93, Del Kathryn Barton, *Come of things*, 2010

DEL KATHRYN BARTON
we too have been there, though we shall land no more 2009
acrylic, gouache, watercolour and pen on polyester canvas
250 x 720 cm

Figure 94, Del Kathryn Barton, *We too have been there, though we shall land no more*, 2010

This is evident in her erotic self-portrait *Come of things* (2010) (figure 93) that depicts two juxtaposed figures of the artist set in a bejewelled enchanted garden: one is a multi-breasted maternal figure with her hand openly pressed to her

[301] Julie Ewington, *Del Kathryn Barton* (Sydney: Piper Press, 2014), 37.

clearly visible vulva, body embellishments with dramatic upswept hairstyle; the other figure is naked, with an elongated penis and elaborate floral headdresses lies supine with legs apart on a pink bed. A panoply of animals, serpents, birds and floral imagery are a visual feast for the viewer. There are no evil forces in Barton's magical world; all her creatures live together harmoniously in peaceful liaisons between humans, animals and birds. This self-portrait is a visual representation of the duality of female sexuality, as both a woman and mother.

In the same spirit, the four paneled painted montage *We too have been there, though we shall land no more* (2010) (figure 94), of over seven metres wide, is an allegorical narrative of Barton's sexual expression. The montage can be understood as a narrative that deals with the origins of her sexual awakening to the present, from a nubile young woman, sexual exploration, motherhood to sexual maturity, in a mix of joy, pleasure and angst. As a portrait of her multiple physical, emotional and spiritual selves, Barton presents seven juxtaposed pale pink naked figures arranged in different positions, some entwined with ribbons and other embellishments, and one head. Two are supine on floating beds, ribbons wind through the legs the meaning of which is obscure. Only one figure in this imagery openly exhibits the throes of sexual pleasure and orgasm represented by the opening of the flower cupped by a hand. An all seeing eye or vulva is placed at the centre of an outstretched palm of one of the two figures on the right which also exhibits a penis, signaling a merging of female and male sexuality as Barton's sexual explorations matured. The figures are accompanied by familiar fauna and flora in dense floating fields, with the rabbit, wallaby, thylacine, owls, birds and serpents taking pride of place in Barton's enchanted garden of vibrant colours and plant shapes. This is a significant self-portrait in which she uses dreamlike masquerades of herself to make sense of the physical desires and emotional sensations of her sexual experience as a woman, with her lived experiences as a mother secondary.

Similarly, the symbolic power of paintings by Annette Bezor and Wendy Sharpe lies in their refiguring of perceptions about female beauty and erotic pleasure. They achieve this by reversing the power of sexual desire from being an object of the male gaze to the subject of their own sexuality. The conventional meaning of

'erotic' is engrained in Western society as 'erotic-for-men' with the naked female form being a sexual spectacle to invite the male gaze, a frisson. Author Natasha Walter argues there has been a resurgence of sexism in contemporary culture focusing on the objectification of women. The result is increased sexualisation of female imagery in both established media and internet sites about how women should look and behave in society.[302] An alternative view from French theorist Julia Kristeva is that "erotic art is all about *jouissance* shifting from visual pleasure to the pursuit of pleasure without rules, ends, or closure".[303] I would argue these three women artists convey *jouissance* in their portrayals of female sexual desire. Their paintings reflect an underlying shift towards female erotica and less sanitised imagery of women's sexuality in postmodern feminist art.

In her art practice, Bezor seeks to deny historical repressed imagery of the female face and body, the objectification and its consequential framing of female identity as an oppressive act of the male gaze. This can be seen in her 'big faces' of idealised beauty in which the eyes dominate the face; while some stare defiantly at the viewer, others are averted or veiled but they are no less powerful in their message challenging the female sexual spectacle. To achieve this level of consciousness in her work, Bezor appropriates female imagery from various sources—classical and modern painting, popular culture and pornography—then recreates the images with new meanings as a symbol of gender equality to subvert the original message. Chris Reid remarks, "The classical and the modern images Bezor uses, all idealise female beauty. They have become iconic, epitomising the objectification of the female in Western art over centuries".[304]

In 1999, her fascination began "with the models used in paintings by Tretchikoff and Tamara de Lempicka, amongst others, because the faces of the models were often passive. I had a desire to represent the women as less passive creatures", says Bezor.[305] An example of how Bezor engages with historical imagery in her work is *Taipei Tang 2* (2007) (figure 95) from her *Tension* series (1999–2007).

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[302] Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virgo Press, 2010).
[303] Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism & Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13.
[304] www.annettebezor.com.
[305] Interview with the artist, Appendix One, 330.

The figure with her exotic oriental features, pink lipstick and hairstyle, wearing a striking pink cheongsam with gold-green coat shows a remarkable likeness to the famous painting *Miss Wong* (1952–1953) (figure 96) by Vladimir Tretchikoff (1913-2006). However, there are differences in the expressions on the faces of the two women: in Tretchikoff's painting, she is chaste even obsequious her eyes downcast, whereas in Bezor's paintings she is bolder, expressing confidence and pride in her sexuality to disarm the male gaze. And yet, both models exude a dignified presence beyond the beautiful face. Moreover, the blue-green skin of the face of Bezor's model alludes to the most well-known of Tretchikoff's paintings the *Chinese Girl* (c1950).

Figure 95: Annette Bezor, *Taipei Tang 2*, 2007
Figure 96: Vladimir Tretchikoff, *Miss Wong*, 1952-3

Bezor's says her earlier works of the 1980s were largely autobiographical, realistic, figurative and very political—the women's movement was strong at this time which influenced the subject matter. Her self-portraits and portraits of women friends focused on placing the female nude in atypical settings to express concerns about how women were treated in society.[306] In the 1990s, however, there was a notable shift away from the autobiographical narrative in her work to stylised images of the face in response to the falsehoods about female beauty being conveyed in mass media. What is important to understand is that Bezor

[306] Interview with the artist, Appendix One, 318-319.

uses her own face, models, as well as appropriates faces from media for her 'big faces', then she de-personalises the visages through subtle changes in expression, eyes and colour of face and hair. She achieved this using digital imaging to experiment with colour and form and editing the original image before painting the big faces onto canvas.

In keeping with this, I explore how Bezor presents visually arresting faces in multiple renditions of the original image with slight changes to reveal subtle differences in the message to the viewer. Critically, Bezor groups the faces into series or pairs to highlight how false notions of female beauty and sexuality are replicated across mass media. Her aim is to problematise the way society looks at images of female beauty and form on advertising billboards, in magazines and internet sites, as a cognisance of 'sameness' which renders them banal. Her faces, with their exotic eyes and red lips appear flat, pale and unblemished, almost surreal, reminding viewers that women are so often regarded in society as mere sexual and decorative objects. Patriarchy maintains this illusion of woman as a non-reciprocal other to man which has historically constrained women's freedom socially and sexually.

Figure 97: Annette Bezor, *Smoulder 1 and 2*, 2000

In the *Smoulder* series, Bezor extends the illusory effects of women viewed in mass media as a decorative object and sexual commodity to one in which they

exert control over their sexuality. For this series she moved away from using her face and those of models to source faces from pornography magazines, notably a famous young pornography model. Rather than depicting their naked bodies in erotic poses, so essential to pornography, Bezor selected only their face and shoulders, thereby denying the viewer the accustomed fantasy sexual encounter. In the pair of paintings *Smoulder 1* and *Smoulder 2* (2000) (figure 97) with their illusion of a naked breast, the first rendition shows a subtle difference from the second which hints at sexual content. The emotion shown in the eyes and facial expression, with the mouth slightly open, is a mixture of reticence and sexual ardour. Importantly, there is a shift in meaning of the face in the second image with a more intent stare that suggests a narrative, a contact with the viewer's gaze, generally regarded as a male gaze.[307] Richard Grayson comments no longer seen as a mere sexual object, the second face engages with the viewer who becomes complicit in the sexual act.[308]

In the same way that she uses the model's eyes to defy the male gaze, Bezor uses coloured veils and flowers to create a visual impact in which the viewer can respond viscerally, and as a consequence, betray their preoccupation with the seductive beauty of the spectacle. Bezor exposes the illusory nature of beauty by masking the faces with these decorative overlays of bright translucent colour of red, blue, yellow, pink, green that recall soft silk scarves. The ribbons of colour are a key feature of the series *Face Values* that highlights how women are judged according to their face, and whether beautiful or not. Furthermore, she adopts another technique of using an orbital sander in a rather brutal fashion to grind back the layers of paint to resemble abraded skin emphasising the fragility of beauty and the sense of self.[309] She uses these techniques in her celebrity series of paintings of Amy Winehouse, Courtney Cox, Kate Moss and Lindsay Lohan. The women are openly celebrated for their fame and beauty but Bezor goes behind the social persona to illustrate the tragedy of their lives through alcohol, drugs and anorexia. In the *Amy Trilogy* (2012) she shows the idolised Amy *Golden AW* as unadored, the media damaged Amy *Damaged AW* with scratches

[307] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (1975): 6–18.
[308] Richard Grayson, *Annette Bezor: A Passionate Gaze* (South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2000), 63.
[309] Interview of the artist, Appendix One, 319.

across the face, and the private Amy *Face Value AW* with coloured ribbons across the face (figure 98). The facial expression and beehive hair style with a small white highlight and pink bow is repeated in all three images, no longer seen as a person but an object of her celebrity status.

Figure 98, Annette Bezor, *Golden AW*, *Damaged AW*, *Face Value AW*, 2012

Bezor further draws from the work of Tretchikoff, as well as Tamara de Lempicka (1898-1980) by applying brightly coloured turbans wound around the head of the subject in many of her paintings. A recent work *Suburban Turban* (2017) of a woman wearing a green velour towel on her head in a turban is a wry social comment on media attention about Muslim women wearing head scarfs and burkas in public. The underlying message in this work is that many women wear turbans, that is, wrapped up wet hair in a towel in private, and yet Muslim women are condemned for wearing similar head wear in public because of their religious convictions. Although the image portrays the likeness of her friend, Gabriella Smart, Bezor does not consider the image a portrait in the convention sense but a semblance of everywoman in society.

The turban also features in a self-portrait *Still Posing After All This Time 2 (Self-Portrait)* (2006) (figure 99) in which Bezor turns the focus back on to herself. In this portrait, she affirms to the viewer that she is indeed the face behind some of the big faces in her oeuvre. She boldly shows herself with a stylised turban that covers her head with a blaze of orange colour and strands of blond hair framing her face. The portrait captures the essence of her likeness with her broad face, big eyes and painted lips, and like her masquerades, it is the intensity of the gaze that captures the viewer. In this self-portrait, the artist makes eye contact

confident in her female beauty and artistic worth. Bezor did not intend to submit the self-portrait for the Archibald Prize but was encouraged by her dealer Paul Greenway at the time. She says 'titles often say as much about the person as the painting itself'.[310] The title of the work implies that she does not take herself too seriously in life.

Figure 99: Annette Bezor, *Still Posing After All This Time 2 (Self-Portrait)*, 2006

Looking at Annette Bezor's masquerades, it is evident that she uses her own image, among others, as a means of exposing the objectification of women in mass media. Unsurprisingly, her portrayals have a voyeuristic edge, representing an encounter between herself and the viewer that embodies the flesh and sexual intimacy. Foremost in her oeuvre, however, is her highly erotic painting *Flogging the Rocking Horse* (2005) (figure 100) in which the artist openly engages with her own sexuality, exploring her inner emotions in a fantasy narrative of seduction. As in Barton's work, this dreamscape montage is an important self-portrait and builds on the imagery of her early works, notably the full nudes and sexual references of her *Entanglement* series developed during the late 1980s and 1990s.

[310] Interview with the artist, Appendix One, 322.

The dreamlike narrative of sexual desire in this work opens the way to Freudian readings of repressed theories on female sexuality and human behaviour that are subsumed in terms of male desire. In the early twentieth century, Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud viewed the inner workings of the human mind as urges and desires that, if repressed, would emerge in the form of dreams, fantasies and creative expressions that were largely infantile and sexual in nature. Freud observed that the unconscious mind was able to produce an alternative 'reality' as a means of fulfillment of desires in dream-like states and the content of these dream-like states could move from one state of mind to another as the person experiences the dream or 'thoughts' of the dream or those repressed aspects of the dream. Fellow Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, in his empirical study of the human mind and dream analysis emphasised that memories, myths, fantasies, imagination and unconscious dreams were essential to the human psyche to enable humans to make sense of their lives.

Figure 100: Annette Bezor, *Flogging the Rocking Horse*, 2005

Arguably, Bezor's self-portrait represents a dreamlike state of the artist liberating her unconscious sexual desire and emotions through an allegorical narrative akin to Barton's dreamscapes. The power of this work is how Bezor confronts her female sexuality through symbolism: the naked protagonist, swirling fire wheel, blue roses and rocking horse against a pink background in which she situates big faces from her previous works. Bezor becomes both the

object and the subject of the gaze in which she communicates her fantasy publicly. Chris Reid explains the image consists of overlaid painted images of new emotional states over images of emotions in earlier works that communicate memory influencing the psychological space of the protagonist. The physical form of a rocking horse being rocked back and forth by a naked woman who fellates a large rubber purple dildo is uttermost in the imagery of this portrait. The self-absorption of the artist with her sexual act may well embody her unfilled desire as a sexual fantasy. A closer analysis of the ring of fire, however, may represent an emotional cleansing.[311] Notwithstanding such views, for Bezor the painting is about loneliness, futility, self-reflection and longing for sexual intimacy at a time when the artist may have felt as though she was flogging a dead horse questioning the direction of her life experiences. The title of the work comes from a song called *The Be All and End All* by Bic Runga about flogging the rocking horse and getting nowhere. "It may look like an out-there painting … but it's about going nowhere, about the futility displayed by this woman in the act of sucking a piece of purple rubber … you realise there's no pleasure in that. There's nobody interacting with her".[312] The sexual poignancy of the work and the underlying narrative is not lost on the viewer.

Like the fantasy montages of Barton and Bezor, Wendy Sharpe's nude portrayals are evidently autobiographical. "In all my paintings the woman artist is me. She usually has my hair-style, but I don't care if she's thinner, fatter, older, younger. It's not relevant. She's playing me in the movie, if you like" [of my life].[313] Without apology or illusions of vanity, Sharpe openly celebrates what could be considered unflattering portrayals of the female body. Her voluptous flesh exposes its nakedness to the viewer's gaze with daring and frank acceptance of her female sexuality. It could be said that Sharpe's provocative self-expressions of her body in intimate scenes are reminiscent of the striking tableaux of the old masters Rubens and Titian, as well as Degas. On the surface her naked portrayals could also be likened to the naked flesh of renowned modern portrait

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311 www.annettebezor.com.
312 "Annette Bezor: Big Heads," *Australian Art Collector*, issue 44, April-June (2008).
313 R. Ian Lloyd, *Studio: Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity—Wendy Sharpe*, (Singapore: R. Ian Lloyd Productions, 2007): 186.

artist Lucien Freud. Freud explores the vulnerability and physicality of the flesh in the human face and body with unflinching realism. His layered physical flesh is palpable, tangible and alive, but less poetic than his contemporaries. Sharpe's portraits of the naked body are eroticised, whereas Freud's naked portraits are more simply a frank expression of the physical body without hubris. Her self-portraits are a personal statement of her female sexuality, his self-portraits an unsentimental reflection of his physical self.

Figure 101: Wendy Sharpe, *Self-portrait as Diane of Erskineville*, 1996
Figure 103: Wendy Sharpe, *Anything goes, Venus Vamp-Burlesque star*, 2012

Sharpe's provocative naked self-portraits are a mix of realism and fantasy. Like Barton and Bezor, Sharpe uses her face and body as a model for her fantasy identities, notably her sex goddess persona, and romantic imagery. Sharpe was awarded the Archibald Prize for her evocative *Self-Portrait as Diana of Erskineville* in 1996 (figure 101). In this self-portrait, she portrays her voluptuous body wearing animal-print tights, a green brassiere, and black thongs in a hot bed of colour. Pouting seductively, she depicts herself as 'Diana, the goddess of hunting' the brave extroverted warrior artist of Erskineville, as a masquerade. The playful incongruity between the hunting bow, toy arrow at her feet, the smiling moon to which the goddess is associated, and salacious images

of the female form and genitalia on the wall behind her creates a momentary discordance that intensifies the fantasy. At first glance, the viewer may dismiss her work as nothing more than self-indulgent ahistorical pastiche fashioned unflatteringly or rather crudely. However, I argue her self-portraits are not as fanciful as the viewer may initially observe because her art practice is seamlessly integrated with her lived experience. Like her contemporaries, Sharpe's personal narrative is inextricably bound within the characters she constructs in her masquerades.

In another self-portrait, *Venus Vamp* (2012) (figure 102), Sharpe juxtaposes her sex goddess self with that of a burlesque performer.[314] In this work, she proclaims the essence of her sexual desire in the form of a burlesque star, a lascivious female striptease artist and not as the classic goddess of love Venus that represents beauty and purity. In Sharpe's portrayal, the viewer is confronted with a vivacious spectacle of Venus Vamp in her tightly corseted bodice with bare breasts, a heart shape emblazoned on her chest, fishnet stockings, long boots and gloves, a top hat and cane. Her reflection is shown in the mirror behind her. She sits with legs apart suggesting erotic intimacy with the audience. With a direct gaze, Sharpe implicates the viewer in her striptease that fleshes out contemporary meanings of overt female sexuality and voyeurism. Venus Vamp is synonymous with Manet's *Olympia* (1863) of a naked courtesan who looks directly and seductively at the viewer without shame denying the male gaze which shocked audiences of the time.

From these two works, I conclude Sharpe's art practice is painted from life as a self-portrait of the artist and her emotional responses to everyday happenings, sexual desires and fantasies. Her desire to express her life experiences and visceral emotions visually is conveyed through the immediacy of her art in a kaleidoscope of colour. She paints her naked self not to flatter the viewer's eye upon her naked body but to express her female sexuality openly. Sharpe takes delight in expressing her femaleness, whether semi-naked lounging in a chair with her partner seated beside her as in the work *John and I by the Fire* (1997)

[314] Discussion with artist, 4 March 2016.

(figure 103) or standing naked, hand on hip, enjoying a drink from a pink cup while soaking up the atmosphere of Venice around her in the work *Pink Cup, Venice* (2010) (figure 104).

Figure 103, Wendy Sharpe, *John and I by the Fire*, 1997
Figure 104: Wendy Sharpe, *Pink Cup Venice*, 2010

In the domestic scene (figure 103), the artist portrays herself as a dominant and sexually satisfied modern woman in what could be regarded as an unglamorous pose. Unlike the idealised nudes of past eras who expressed nothing of the self, Sharpe's semi-naked body communicates much about the artist's sexuality that animates the self with passion and sensation of an outspokenness in the present. The artist is viewed enjoying pizza and 'Victorian Bitter', post coitus perhaps, while her naked partner sits at her feet mending her dress. He is wearing a pair of her floral sandals, while she wears his football socks and boots, in what can be described as a humorous or outlandish reversal of sexual roles. In the work *Pink Cup, Venice* (figure 104) Sharpe is again unabashed in her nakedness wearing hot pink slippers and holding a matching pink cup. Her identity as an artist is evident from the paint brushes placed overtly on the table with other paraphernalia and quick sketches in charcoal discarded underneath. Ephemera of modern life—sunglasses, handbag, wine bottle and so forth—merge into a contemporary view of the city, canals and palazzo of her Venetian experience. The painting or photograph on the wall behind her of a naked woman and man

hints at a sexual liaison, however, the portrait is not eroticised as with the previous works.

Although Sharpe exploits the historical notion of the naked nude in her highly subjective self-portraits, her naked self-image would not be regarded as a passive object of the male gaze. Sharpe portrays herself as a woman and artist who takes sensual pleasure in overtly expressing her female sexuality, whether masking the self in the guise of a sultry sex goddess, a heroine from a mythical world or revealing intimate truths of a life well lived.

I conclude, Sharpe and her contemporaries Bezor and Barton challenge prevailing attitudes of female beauty and sexuality with their contemporary portrayals of the female face and form. They turn the viewer's gaze onto themselves with clarity and candour, whether as models of their fantasies or refiguring perceptions of female beauty and sexuality, and highlighting a new social attitude to the naked nude that is reshaping the landscape of contemporary portraiture. Their provocative works build on postmodern feminism that gives rise to new expressions of female sexuality illuminated by the dreams and desires of modern women in portraiture today.

Julie Ewington comments that women have been central to the shifts in contemporary art in Australia because of "the particular and eminently valuable perspectives women bring to working as artists, and to social discourses more broadly", some triggered by personal narrative, others informed by gender stereotyping and social discordance.[315] Importantly, exhibitions of works by women artists that embrace the power of the legacy of feminism, much like those of Barton, Bezor and Sharpe, or intersect directly with feminism are rapidly growing in the twenty-first century. Susan Best in her critique of the 2012 exhibition *Contemporary Australia: Women* in Brisbane situated the show with the recent international trend of large survey women-only exhibitions, described

[315] Julie Ewington, *Contemporary Australia: Women* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, 2012), 18.

as "feminist blockbusters."[316] This is despite criticisms that the exhibition failed "to explicitly include feminism in the conceptual framing, the title or the promotional material for the exhibition".[317] GOMA promoted the women-only exhibition as a major commitment to contemporary art by women without the explicit feminist banner, as part of a series on Contemporary Australia. Ewington, curator of the exhibition, emphasised what mattered was showcasing the achievements in contemporary art practice by selected women artists in Australia and not the need to redress gender inequality or feminist politics per se. She said, "More generally, the exhibition allows us time to stop, to consider what Australian women artists and filmmakers are saying and doing, right now".[318] Thus, women-only shows remain a valuable tool for women artists to exhibit their work. Contemporary perspectives on art and portraiture can be explicitly aligned with postmodern feminist ideals or eschewed, with some women artists seeking recognition for their work rather than be tainted with the 'F' word [feminism] and integration into the mainstream.

In this chapter, I have shown how the self-portrait offers the artist an opportunity to move beyond likeness through metaphor and masquerade to create an ideal or fictional representation of selfhood. Self-portraits may have the allure of a private diary or an allegorical narrative that gives the viewer an 'imagined' insight into the artist self. Furthermore, the self-portrait gives the artist a contemporary voice to assert their presence in society, whether that is a feminist voice or an engagement with the self that is grounded in an alternative dialogue in new contexts. Indeed, the self-portrait remains a ready form of self-expression, promotion and deception.

In a world dominated by social media and the internet, artists and ordinary people explore ideas of personal identity in contemporary portraiture in a culture of social connectedness. This desire for social belonging and the

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[316] Art historian Hilary Robinson coined the term 'feminist blockbuster' in 2012 to describe international exhibitions between 2005-2011 that occurred in major museums, were surveys not themed shows, intersected with feminism and responded to a significant moment of the women's movement.
[317] Susan Best, "What is a feminist exhibition? Considering Contemporary Australia: Women," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 2016, Vol 40:2, 190-202.
[318] Ewington, 22.

explosion of the selfie on hand-held devices to facilitate this connectedness are explored in the next chapter. Furthermore, I consider how the painted portrait in miniature is a modern visual response to the selfie in the contemporary context.

CHAPTER SIX: SELFIES AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Greater connectivity since the 1990s has dramatically changed the media landscape and society's response to the information technology revolution fostering new forms of social engagement. No longer passive responders to the dominant ideology of popular culture communicated through mass media in the twentieth century, ordinary people have become active users of social media and the internet. At the same time, artists have adapted to new technologies as modern media of creativity and communication changing how we view portraiture.

In this chapter, I consider the influence of digital technology and social connectedness on portraiture today. In doing so, I shift the focus in part from the artist's engagement to examine more fully the effects of the digital revolution on popular culture, in particular the rise of the 'this is me' photographic portrait—the selfie. It has a different meaning to that of a traditional self-portrait in which the image is admired for its likeness of the subject and artistic merit. The selfie is more about the desire to take portraits of oneself and be looked at or admired by others in a culture of social connectedness. This connectivity is implicit in the desire to link up to social media and link in to internet sites online in the networked-digital age. I argue the desire for social connectedness and the need to take selfies is redefining portraiture. I do not contend that the selfie is the only face of portraiture in the twenty-first century despite its pervasiveness. Digital photographs, however, form a significant part of this connectivity. Anne Marsh remarks, "The digital age ushers in new zones of contact and connection between people, making photography even more central to our lives … and the vehicle for constructing private and public memories".[319]

[319] Marsh, *Look Contemporary Australian Photography since 1980*, 382.

The chapter is divided into three parts.

In the first part, I explore how social connectedness has become suffused with new social meanings from the online sharing of images and micro-communications. To support my arguments, I draw on the work of social theorists and researchers. In this context, I refer to the work of Manuel Castells on contemporary media cultures in the information age and the networked society. I also turn to the writings of Russell Belk and Sherry Turkle on the effects of computer culture resulting in an extension of self-identity beyond social belonging to connectivity in the information age. Belk's notion of the 'extended self' is understood in the context of the online persona; whereas Turkle's proposition of the 'second self' is evidenced in the use of information technology provoking self-reflection that subsequently compels people to think and see themselves differently and act more superficially in their connections with others. While Belk points out the importance of photographs as a marker of self-identity, I note an omission from Turkle's study that she does not specifically address the image in her discourse. Nevertheless, her analysis of the second self and connectivity in the computer age is of particular value to this study.

In the second part, I analyse the changing landscape of personal photographic imaging practices with the advent of the selfie. I draw on recent research on the motivations behind the taking and uploading of selfies onto social media as a key to self-identity. Furthermore, I consider the painted portrait in miniature as a contemporary visual response to the selfie. I argue the miniature painted portraits of contemporary Australian artist Natasha Bieniek mirror the presence of the selfie on hand-held devices.

In the final part of the chapter, I examine the immateriality of the fictional identity on portraiture. This can be seen in the cyber world of virtual reality as digital representations that go beyond the immediacy of the self. Amelia Jones refers to this as 'technophenomenology' which "intertwines intersubjectivity with interobjectivity: we are enworlded via the envelopment of our bodies in space, the touch of our hands on a keyboard, the stroke of our gaze on the video screen … using the artists own body/self as both subject and object, as

multiplicitous, particular, and unfixable, and engaging with audiences in increasingly interactive ways".[320] She argues such an understanding of an embodied, dispersed body or self invites a rethinking of individual subjectivity. I argue selfhood is not denied in the cyber world of virtual reality but is comprehended as an alternate self-identity which can be seen in the portrait works by Italian artists Eva and Franco Mattes.

Social Connectedness: linked in and linked up

The desire to form and maintain social bonds is well accepted as a powerful human trait. Social bonds are associated with a sense of self-identity and social belonging. This belonging is conflated in shared interests, experiences and self-validation that enhance feelings of social worth. On one hand, people's sense of self is encompassed in the values of socially significant others whether it is one's immediate family, social circle of friends, work or sporting others, as much as themselves. On the other hand, people may adopt the appearances and lifestyles of celebrities and famous people seen on popular media sites or in gallery settings, as their own.

In this thesis, I contend the traditional boundaries of social representation separating private and public spheres are being extended, challenged and in some cases eroded in the networked-digital age. How people present images of themselves, document their lives, come together and interact with others online through internet and social media sites is reshaping social engagement beyond mere social belonging and perceptions of self-identity and it is impacting on portraiture today. I argue the prevalence of the self-image on social media and internet sites thrives on the desire for connectivity within a global social network of users and consumers transforming the way people view images of themselves and others. This may explain in part why social media and internet sites have become flooded with selfies, photo-sharing and virtual identities as portrayals of self-hood.

[320] Amelia Jones, "Dispersed Subjects and the Demise of the 'Individual': 1990s Bodies in/as Art": 705.

At the heart of Castells' thinking is the idea that modernity shifted from the industrial age into an age governed by a networked society of informational and global capitalism. He calls this "the culture of *real virtuality* where make-believe is belief in the making".[321] He argues this shift was brought about by, inter alia, the development of new media technologies, the diversification of media messages and the building of a multitude of globalised information networks culminating into a networked society. In Castells' information age, 'networking' has become the dominant form of social organisation and communication. This is not to say that social networking has not existed at other times, however, he contends the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout entire social structures and across the globe. Important for this thesis, the networked society has become central to the individual against a backdrop of personalised engagement online through sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Indeed, users are able to communicate beyond socially defined boundaries, thereby expanding sociability and absorbing global media cultures.

In 1998, Belk presented the concept of 'the extended self', embodied in relationships with people, places and objects. He argued that possessions were markers of individual and collective memory, as well as social belonging. At the same time, he noted that photographs were regarded as prominent items of identity among keepsakes anchoring people's memories over the course of their lives. This was long before the advent of the selfie, social media and photo-sharing sites. In 2013, Belk further asserted the relationship between the online and offline persona has become the key to self-identity and the extended self in the digital age. Notably, he observed the public faces people present to the world online and the reality of people's private lives offline can be at odds.[322]

Turkle's ground-breaking work over thirty plus years focuses on how the engagement with information technology has changed the way people think, see themselves and act in their relationships with others in everyday life. She goes

[321] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Networked Society; The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture,* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 406.
[322] Belk, "Extended Self in a Digital World," 477–500.

beyond Belk's notion of the extended self with a new perspective on peoples' responses to contemporary computer culture and connectivity embodied in networked devices. In her first critical work *Second Self* (1984), she argued the evocative nature of 'thinking' computers—an object that fascinates, disturbs equanimity and precipitates thought—provoked people to think differently about the self and how they interacted with others in society. She reasoned, "But as computers become commonplace objects in daily life—in leisure and learning as well as in work—everyone will have the opportunity to interact with them in ways where the machine can act as a projection of the part of the self, a mirror of the mind".[323] She encouraged people to look beyond the computer as a machine with a memory, a tool for communication to the effects of computer culture on lived experience and selfhood. In her writing, she presented portrayals of how people responded to the influence of computers in everyday life.

By the 1990s, the focus of new technology had shifted from one-on-one interactions with a computer to connections with people online and in virtual worlds. Turkle describes this shift in her second work *Life on the Screen* (1995).[324] From her research, she concluded the culture of simulations in which people create new identities as alternative selves in virtual worlds on the internet encourages a rethinking of self-identity in terms of parallel lives, multiplicity and fragmentation. She explains:

> The many manifestations of multiplicity in our culture, including the adoption of multiple on-line personae, are contributing to a general reconsideration of traditional, unitary notions of identity. On-line experiences with "parallel lives" are part of the cultural context that supports new theorizations about multiple selves.[325]

This is also evident in simulation gaming in which people can role play multiple characters that interact with simulated applications on video and internet games. Turkle's views on computer culture and connectivity are persuasive in the

[323] Turkle, *Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*, 4.
[324] Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet,* 1995
[325] Sherry Turkle, "Computational Technologies and Images of the Self," *Social Research* 64:3 (Fall 1997): 104.

knowledge that young people today are more willing to comprehend multiplicity through their online experiences and simulation gaming having grown-up with information technology as 'digital natives'.

What is important in terms of this thesis, is a shift occurred in the understanding of selfhood and sociability that resulted in a change in people thinking about how to represent themselves and communicate with others using information technology and new media. What was regarded as radical in 1984 of projecting the idea of the computer as a second self has been advanced three decades later, with internet and social networking sites opening up new pathways for exploring selfhood and sociability in the twenty-first century.[326] Furthermore, as new media became mobile by being enacted on hand-held devices, so to were increased demands being placed upon social engagement in a fully networked society. In her third work *Alone Together* (2011) which completes the trilogy, Turkle looks more deeply into the effects of being continuously connected to smart phones and online sites in which people suffer from fears of separation, and inter alia, of being 'alone together' in their quest for social connectedness seen today an essential part of everyday life. Turkle regards this connectivity not merely as a second self but as a new generation of the self in which people expect more from new technology and less from themselves in their social interactions. Social networking and virtual sites may promise closeness, even intimacy but people are connecting to simulations of themselves and others in which they are alone in their togetherness as substitutes for connecting face-to-face.[327]

In her latest research, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (2015), Turkle presents further analysis of how virtual communication on the internet and social media is degrading the quality of human relationships through social disconnection anxiety, not only separation but also the 'fear of missing out' by not being in constant communication with others, an inability to empathise with other people's feelings and the desire to craft more appealing personal identities online. The constant presence and use of hand-held devices in the attendance of others is inhibiting the development of meaningful

[326] Sherry Turkle, *Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*, 3.
[327] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, 1–11.

interpersonal relationships and empathy about how other people are feeling or thinking in everyday situations. People today spend more time texting each other on smart phones than speaking to each other on the phone or in person. This has implications for not only how people communicate but also how they represent self-hood in digital portraits, such as editing a photograph for Instagram or setting up a Facebook profile that alters the presentation of the self to gain acceptance from others. Thus, sharing something of oneself online is viewed as more appealing than revealing the 'real' self in person. This is further exacerbated by superficial online communications and interactions that revolve around images and micro-communications online. I reiterate there is nothing new in fashioning the self in the networked-digital age.

It is not surprising then that social acceptance and validation of selfhood underpins social interactions and online sharing of images today. This takes into account the compulsion in which people take selfies, texts and upload images online to enhance social belonging. When threatened, people's behaviour and sense of self can be affected. Such sensitivity is putting pressure on people to be 'affiliated' or 'liked' by social networked others in their online communications. In some cases, the desire to be 'liked' leads some people to share intimate aspects and sexualised images of themselves in selfies on hand-held devices and social media sites. That said, the social and moral concerns of what appears in selfies would seem to be less important than the desire for affirmation and social connectedness, even with strangers. Alternatively, people create simulations of themselves and view others on digital screens in virtual worlds. Such a fluidity of engagement may encourage people to act out or observe fantasy identities that they may not otherwise present or encounter in real life. Thus, social connectedness opens up new forms of spectatorship in the twenty-first century.

Even though Turkle has broadened her research to examine the effects of social networking, texts, microblogs, online gaming and virtual communities on the self-identity, she has not extended her analysis to encompass the image or portrait, notably the pervasiveness of selfies on hand-held devices and dissemination online, nor their impact on self-identity. Nevertheless, in her

observations of virtual communities, she gives some insights into the artificial world of avatars and robots as seductive simulations of the self.

The selfie

The online sharing of digital images provides a contemporary lens into peoples' lives and popular visual culture, expanding the lexicon of vernacular photography. Indeed, the need to take photographs of oneself and post these portraits online as an instant visual communication for anyone to see, and view similar images of friends, family and socially networked others, has become a social phenomenon in the networked-digital age. As a powerful means of self-expression, the selfie has become ubiquitous, with millions of photographs uploaded everyday online on social networking sites and photo sharing sites. The selfie is different from traditional forms of self-representation. Daniel Palmer affirms this saying the interest in portraiture has extended beyond the traditional forms of representation to collaboration and image sharing which is indicative of the selfie and social media, as a modern phenomenon.[328]

Notwithstanding that self-portraits using established media are a means of self-expression, promotion and deception, the selfie is more about social connectivity and less about mimesis. This can be understood in the context of the self-image as a 'performed character' and not of the 'real self', as espoused by Erving Goffman (Chapter Three). For him, the perception of the self was largely a social construct of performances and responses to social interactions.[329] His argument that individuals seek to present themselves and events in their lives in a favourable way through social engagement is as relevant today online as it was in face-to-face encounters in the 1950s. Like Goffman's theatrical metaphor of 'putting on an act' to an audience, we view everyday social encounters on social media as largely performances or a game strategy from which the socialised self emerges after negotiations with others.[330] This highlights the performative nature of the selfie, where the person taking the selfie performs for an imagined

[328] Interview with the Associate Professor, Appendix Five, 345.
[329] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 22–30.
[330] Ibid, Goffman, 242–243.

or known audience to elicit responses of affirmation on social media sites. I contend the selfie is a communication tool associated with social networking and self-enhancement motives that shapes social and personal identity.

The selfie is broadly defined as a digital photograph taken of the self, with or without other people in the frame, typically taken on hand-held devices and then uploaded online. Although the selfie can be traced back to 2002, it gained momentum globally in 2010 with the availability of the dual-view camera (front and rear) and LCD screens combined with photo-apps (photographic applications).[331] The focal perspective of the early selfies was distorted. A person typically held a hand-held device at arm's length and took the selfie slightly above the head at an odd angle which resulted in a disproportionately bigger head to the body. Subsequent technological advancements to camera lenses, editing filters and a 'portrait mode' application makes it easier to fashion and post more attractive selfies online today.

In order to make sense of the selfie, I consider its similarities with vernacular photography of the past. The availability and ease of use of the portable Kodak Brownie box camera circa 1900 enabled photography and portraiture to become more widespread across society. No longer was the general public reliant on professional photographers to take staged formal portraits in studios which resulted in the growth of amateur photography. This is still evident today as ordinary people 'point, snap and share' photographs instantly online. Selfies may be likened to 'happy snaps' or a passing resemblance to 'photo-booth' portraits (a composite of four miniature photographs in strip formation taken in automatic photo-booths commonly placed in shopping centres, bus and train stations) of past decades. It offered a cheap alternative to the studio photograph, with its small curtained photo-booth with seat, fixed lighting, a pre-set camera lens behind a mirror and image production all in one package. Thus, the stage was set for a spectacle to delight the consumer within minutes, as the vending

[331] According to the ABC, the first know *selfie* was posted to an ABC online science forum on 13 September 2002 in which a user dubbed 'Hopey' used the term *selfie* by referring to a photography of himself. The *selfie* was named by the Oxford Dictionaries in 2013 as the word of the year, acknowledging it is a common practice in popular media, www.abc.net.au on 19 November 2013.

machine provided photographic evidence of self-directed and often jocular performances. Selfies, however, are more than photo-booth photographs and happy snaps placed in family albums shared only among family and close friends and not intended for public viewing, they are uploaded online for anyone to see. Portraiture today is made for public consumption on a global scale.

Figure 105: Woman taking a selfie, www.google.com

It is clear that over time people have become adept at being photographed: first in the studio, second by the portable camera, and third on smart phones and tablets. I contend the self-conscious public display of taking a selfie has become an accepted part of everyday life. This is evident in figure 105 of a young woman seemingly delighted in taking her selfie in public. A broad happy smile and wink to the camera confirms the joy of the moment. The lighting exaggerates the shadow of the woman's arm, giving the photograph more depth against a pale purple-pink background. Looking at the image in this way, the staged nature of the selfie is evident, featuring an exaggerated pose performed for the pleasure of family, friends and followers on social media. While I argue selfies are more about social connectedness, they are also a mark of vanity. A selfie can be reframed and edited before and after the shot has been taken to make the subject appear more beautiful or desirable before being texted or uploaded online seeking affirmation from delighted networked others. This may imply that selfies are narcissistic, a vainglorious tool of an egocentric person desirous of fame and admiration.

In recent years, there has been a global rise in research on the effects of the selfie on human behaviour by social scientists and researchers. One such study by American psychologist Jessica McCain and colleagues who examined the relationship between three types of narcissism: grandiose, vulnerable and the darker traits, as well as the frequency and motivations behind the taking of selfies. Grandiose narcissism is seen as charismatic and attention seeking, whereas vulnerable narcissism is regarded as less confident and secure in behavioural reflections and the darker traits is understood as excessive narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. The results of their study show that grandiose narcissism is associated with taking and posting more selfies, experiencing more positive effects when taking selfies and self-promotion motives; is also well suited to social media. Vulnerable narcissism is associated with the negative affect of attention seeking behaviour, and surprisingly self-esteem is seen as unrelated to taking selfies. The more extraverted form of narcissism is linked positively with self-presentation and self-enhancement motives (appearing attractive, sexy, smiling) in terms of engagement on social media compared to the more introverted or insecure form that guards against rejection by editing or filtering images. The dark triad traits of personality in part resembled grandiose narcissism but were associated with extremism, escapism and boredom. All forms of narcissistic behaviour responded negatively when being disliked by followers. Unsurprisingly, the researchers concluded selfies can be conceptualised as a reflection of personality and how people position themselves among others in society.[332]

I ask have selfie users become their own biggest fans in the 'would be' celebrity stakes, seeking their 'fifteen minutes of fame' or narcissistic self-aggrandisement to convince others of their popularity?

In 1986, Andy Warhol was credited for saying 'In the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes' predicting fame's fleeting nature in what was then regarded as a celebrity-saturated popular culture. Warhol appropriated, manipulated and produced screen prints of the rich and famous which became

[332] Jessica L. McCain et al, "Personality and Selfies: Narcissism and the Dark Triad," *Computers in Human Behaviour* 64 (2016): 126–133.

iconic media commentaries on the popular culture of the time. Popular visual culture today is no less fascinated or obsessed with celebrity, youth and beauty and the desire to be seen and admired by others. In the networked-digital age, it is more likely that the ordinary person's fifteen minutes of fame will be a selfie seen on a hand-held device or online rather than a photographic portrait viewed on a gallery wall, in a magazine or on television.

Figure 106: The former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd: Selfie Strategy, Brisbane, 14 August 2013, www.google.com.au

Celebrities who extoll an inflated self-image and self-congratulatory behaviour can garner adoration and approval from followers who seek snippets of their lives on social media and the internet sites. Social networking has become an effective marketing tool to advertise and broadcast the self as a desirable brand to anyone who is linked in to social media and linked up to internet sites. Hence, the selfie is the preferred medium of marketing oneself to others in the twenty-first century. For example, on the political campaign trail in 2013, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was seen taking a selfie with three young people in Brisbane (figure 106). The close-up shot of their faces puts the viewer into an intimate engagement with the persons photographed. Rudd viewed the selfie as a fast, simple way of promoting a positive self-image or individual brand as the next Prime Minister (again) in tune with young people in the electorate during the Federal election campaign. Rudd holds his smart phone away from himself to ensure his three delighted followers are included in the selfie expressing a

candid moment. This photograph was taken by another person and uploaded on the internet for everyone to view.

Furthermore, the preference for smart devices over digital cameras by ordinary people is all the more common simply because people have them constantly in their possession. Besides any disharmony of the image taken quickly on smart phones and tablets may be counterbalanced by the pleasurable sensations of the person photographed in the mind of the viewer. Hence, the value of the selfie is less determined by its aesthetic qualities and more about how the subject portrayed is perceived by the viewer. Put another way, in her writings on contemporary spectatorship, Renee van de Vall highlights two examples of Merleau-Ponty's perspective theory from his writing *Eye and Mind*. "The first shows how my relation to myself and to others is fashioned in the experience of seeing. [And second] It also articulates the relation of vision to technology, and with that to culture and history, even if the technical object is as simple as a mirror".[333] I also note Turkle once described the computer as a "mirror of the mind" in her analysis of the second self but now believes the metaphor does not go far enough to describe networked devices in the twenty-first century. She comments, "Our new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology".[334] Thus, like a mirror, a selfie taken on a hand-held device converts the image into a spectacle to be admired by others.

At the same time, how selfies are leading to greater self-revelation and self-disclosure on social media and internet sites is relevant to contemporary portraiture. Users are actively communicating snippets of their lives or voicing personal revelations and sharing more intimate images of themselves online. One possible reason for this is users may seek to bridge the gap between the online self and the actual self; the public self and private persona. Another possible reason for the greater disclosure of personal information or

[333] Renee van de Vall, *At the Edges of Vision: A Phenomenological Aesthetics of Contemporary Spectatorship*, (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 27.
[334] Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, 16.

exhibitionism displayed in selfies may reflect the overexposure of people's lives in the networked-digital age. "As with the transformation of private diaries into public revelations of inner secrets, the lack of privacy in many aspects of social media can leave the users feeling vulnerable".[335] Belk explains that if a lack of inhibition results in greater online sharing, impetus for confession leads to greater depth in self-disclosures: the good, bad and sinful in blogs, social media and internet sites. He makes reference to "Foucault's (1978, 1998) viewpoint that confessing our secret truths feels freeing, even as it binds us in a guilt-motivated self-governance born of a long history of Christian and pre-Christian philosophies and power structures … [of what he] called *Exomologesis* or 'publishing oneself' has never been easier to accomplish".[336] What was once considered private communication is now more likely to be made public with the re-posting of images and sentiments online to everyone. The latter may discourage some users from the 'oversharing' of personal information and intimate selfies that could be then broadcasted to unintended audiences online.

Nevertheless, personal acceptance is part of the selfie equation. People take selfies to direct and understand how they are viewed by others. This is what cyber-psychologist John Suter refers to as the 'observing-ego' when people look at the self through the eyes of others, as a bridge between others perceptions of them and their own self-concept.[337] The desire to fit in and be accepted by others may encourage both conformity and risk-taking behaviour to counteract negative perceptions of themselves or others in images on social media. Affirmation may explain why people desire to portray an 'ideal' sense of self or express sexually overt behaviour in which they imagine themselves acceptable to others in the hope of obtaining a sense of certainty about selfhood. The 'ideal' self has qualities or physical attributes a person desires to possess or feels obligated to present to others socially, and not the actual self. What is imagined, however, may never be actually achieved because of a misapprehension of the self or a misrecognition about how other people view them. Creating and

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[335] Belk, "Extended Self in a Digital World": 484.
[336] Ibid, Belk, 485.
[337] John Suter, "From Self-portraits to Selfies," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 12:2 (June 2015): 175–180.

sharing an 'ideal' identity online may be more desirable than expressing the real self in face-to-face interactions, as Turkle explains in her research. Even so, people look at and share portraits of themselves on social media sites seeking the approval of others even if they do not see themselves as the object of desire that others seek to emulate or admire. The hopeful seeks recognition and acceptance of how he or she looks or behaves in selfies with the goal of garnering 'likes' or reassurance, whereas 'not likes' may be viewed as personal criticism or dismissed as just another selfie. The recipient of a selfie decodes the image by interpreting clues of pose, dress, ambiance and sexual references, whether intended or not. On the surface, reciprocity of positive comments about appearance or opinions is aimed at reaffirmation of social belonging within immediate or wider social circles. Thus, if someone says something nice then the recipient of the text, microblog or selfie may be obliged to reciprocate with positive feedback, especially as comments are visible to other networked users and potentially available publicly in a wider social context long after they have been posted online.

Moreover, a notable trend prevalent amongst young people today, in particular women and girls, is the uploading of intimate moments and sexually suggestive selfie portraits onto social media sites—potentially the sexier the selfie, the more 'likes' are garnered from followers. In his study into the visual culture of selfies, Derek Murray examined the self-imaging strategies of young women in their teens and early twenties on social media. Contrary to negative mass media about 'sexy selfies', he remarks "young women themselves often characterize the selfie (on social media sites) as a radical act of political empowerment: as a means to resist the male dominated media culture's obsession with and oppressive hold over their lives and bodies".[338] Murray contends this engagement could be viewed as mere narcissism or a politically oppositional and aesthetic form of resistance of what he refers to as the female gaze. In his critique of selfies taken by women who embrace the female body in their sexualised imagery, he claims the "visual power of online self-portraiture is rooted in a type of pleasure that is

[338] Derek Conrad Murray, "Notes to Self: the Visual Culture of Selfies in the Age of Social Media," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 18:6 (2015): 490.

voraciously claimed: an opposition desire and enjoyment of oneself as a response to a culture of devaluing and miss-representation".[339] He foregrounds a case of the female gaze with the female image-maker placing herself in the position of both subject and object, of seeing and being seen by oneself. Merleau-Ponty throws light on this proposition by stating "Because 'my' body always has a different status from that of other objects, "seeing" is always described from within as 'my seeing' … body is always seen and seeing, at the same time subject and object of sight. It sees itself seeing".[340] I conclude the confluence of hyper-sexualised imagery and the selfie can be regarded as a tool of social connectedness to gain popularity and acceptance with peers and followers on social media, notwithstanding the rise of an empowered female presence where the spectacle of the positive sexualised female body is a growing force in imaging the self among young women today. It could also simply be an act of rebellion with young people seeking to express their sexuality more freely than what is acceptable in society at the time.

Mirroring the selfie: the miniature portrait

Although the miniature painted portrait is not prevalent in portraiture today, I contend it is a visual response to the way people take and view images of the self and others on hand-held devices and social media in the contemporary context. The gravitas of the painted miniature as a memento of loved ones first came to prominence in Europe in the sixteenth century.[341] Painted miniatures, cameos and lockets were portable keepsakes carried by people in purses, pockets or on the person. By their very nature miniatures invite intimacy. Indeed, the diminutive size of the miniature portrait forms an intimate experience with the viewer and mirrors the presence of the selfie today.

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[339] Ibid, Conrad Murray, 512.
[340] Van de Vall, *At the Edges of Vision: A Phenomenological Aesthetics of Contemporary Spectatorship*, 27.
[341] The miniature portraiture developed from medieval illuminated manuscripts flourished in Europe in the sixteenth century for the wealthy as keepsakes and then gained popularity in the Middle East and India during the Mughal Empire. Painted in fine detail primarily on vellum and paper, and later on ivory and copper. In the nineteenth century, photography provided an affordable alternative to painted miniatures and demand declined.

In this part, I argue the miniature painted portraits of artist Natasha Bieniek provides evidence of the juncture between the historical tradition of portrait miniatures as keepsakes and portraits taken on smart phones and tablets. Bieniek's miniatures create a nexus between a historically significant medium and selfies about how we observe and share portraits of ourselves and others in miniature. The small scale of her paintings is evident in figure 107, a photograph of her miniature portrait *Gardenia* (2014) seen enclosed in a hand that accords to the way people observe images on hand-held devices today.

Figure 107: Natasha Bieniek, *Gardenia*, 2014

Bieniek composes her miniatures using conventional portrait techniques and methods employed in England and France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries juxtaposed in a contemporary vision. She explains, "The use of handheld devices miniaturises the way we observe pictures on a regular basis. I'm interested in sharing the link between how we perceive images in contemporary culture and how we have done so in the past".[342] This is evident in her miniature self-portrait *Application* (2013) (figure 108), painted in blue-green-grey on a shiny metal composite Di-bond which has a slick, glossy quality, not unlike that of a smartphone casing. The artist who sits passively, gazing blankly at the viewer in what could be regarded as an everyday image of a young woman dressed in modern casual clothes, is underscored by her hand placed at the centre of the portrait. In sixteen century Italian painting, a raised finger was

[342] www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/archibald/bieniek.

used to symbolise adherence to religious faith or draw the viewer's attention to the person portrayed. Here Bieniek adopts the pose to draw the viewer's gaze to herself, in short conveying to the viewer that this is a self-portrait of the artist. Moreover, her portrait emphasise the desire to be looked at and admired by others in miniature, mirroring the contemporary obsession with the selfie constantly viewed on social media and internet sites.

Figure 108: Natasha Bieniek, *Application*, 2013
Figure 109: Natasha Bieniek, *Fluoroscuro*, 2012

Moreover, in an earlier self-portrait, *Fluoroscuro* (2012) (figure 109) inspired by the Italian Baroque method of *chiaroscuro* with its application of dramatic contrasts of light against dark to create high drama and illusion, Bieniek draws a distinction between the past and present by using fluorescent lighting to create the contrasts on her face and body and reflections onto the high gloss surfaces. The power cord hints at this technique. The softness and warmth of the red velvet fabric on which her arm rests provide an added contrast to the cold, black, shiny table surface and luminous green background. Employing these methods further strengthens the emotional impact of the portrait. It is also reminiscent of Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (c1523-24) a miniature image of contradictory illusion and self-deception within an oval frame. Like Parmigianino, Bieniek dramatically objectifies herself to the viewer in what

could be regarded as vain sensual pose, seen as a reflection of the self in a mirror or alternatively a selfie, but it is a ruse, an illusion.

Bieniek engages the viewer in different ways with her evocative diminutive figurative paintings some of which in the words of the artist, expresses "melancholia, restlessness and uneasiness".[343] In her 2012 series of portraits, *She Hangs Brightly*, she depicts female figures, including the herself, in various states of repose alone in a moment of emotional internal reflection or disharmony and often wrapped in layers of fabrics. When captured reclining in awkward poses, the figures express fragility, a sense of uneasiness, that in turn unsettles the viewer who seeks to understand the emotional context. In what would be regarded as a private moment, the images become public, symptomatic of the contemporary unease with the oversharing of intimate selfies and the scrutiny of messages posted on social media. Hence, public revelation of inner secrets or private happenings can leave people feeling vulnerable.

Figure 110: Natasha Bieniek, *Untitled*, 2012
Figure 111: Natasha Bieniek, *Sahara*, 2014

In the work *Untitled* (2012) (figure 110) a young woman reclines awkwardly, her arm and leg falls to the floor, her face is covered, as if she is unwilling to engage with the world expressing a sense of helplessness. The soft subtle tones of the fabrics draped over her body against a pale background and diffused light adds to the moodiness and tension of the portrait. The pink and green floral fabric

[343] Penelope Grist, "In the Flesh," *Portrait 47* (2014): 14.

could be likened to a keepsake, adding to the fragility of the human emotion. In another miniature portrait *Hazel* (2012), a woman wrapped in soft fabrics also hides her face in what could be regarded as despair or remorse. Seen alone in an intimate space, these figures become an object of the viewer's gaze. Bieniek's approach to obscure her identity in her portraits is further reflected in her award winning self-portrait *Sahara* (2014) (figure 111) for the 2015 Portia Geach Memorial Award. Again, she adds a mysterious element to the work by denying the viewer a moment of intimacy with the artist by hiding her face. Dressed in modern clothing and partly covered in floral fabric, the artist reclines against the wall with an eerie stillness that hints at restrained emotion. The abundance of brown drapery placed around the artist represents natural scenery that creates a nexus between the person and nature.

In short, Bieniek reclaims the power of the meticulously executed miniature painted portrait in an age dominated by selfies and social networking. This is further evident in her portrait of Wendy Whiteley *Wendy Whiteley* (2016), a finalist for the Archibald prize which represents is a significant departure from the 'big heads' that dominate entries each year. The portrait explores the way humans relate to the natural world, in this case the tranquility of an inner-city garden away from the urban chaos and saturated world of social media. The portrait of Wendy Whitely sitting amongst the lush green foliage of her harbourside garden in Lavender Bay suggests a oneness with nature, a living breathing world, and also a vulnerability, as a reflection of her past excesses and sadness with the loss of loved ones. Wearing a blue dress and trademark head scarf, she is composed but stares intently at the viewer. She began restoration of the garden after the death of her husband and renowned painter Brett Whiteley in 1992 who painted dramatic portraits of his wife and Sydney harbour. Grief stricken she began clearing the unused land outside her house. The garden is her refuge, a place of solitude and peace in the twenty-first century.

Beyond the self

Contemporary portraiture when distilled through digital technologies and new media forms can de-humanise the subject, and yet appear uncanny—familiar and

strange at the same time. In the final part of this chapter, I examine the significance of the fantasy identity that goes beyond the immediacy of the physical and emotional self. Rather than a predicable image of likeness, an artist or user can translate the self into a mythical consciousness, a fictional identity transported into a public or private world, or indeed, a virtual world where mimesis may be denied by the immateriality of the image.

Renee van de Vall asks whether the feeling of presence or materiality found in more traditional forms of art is irrevocably lost when digital imaging intervenes. She refers to earlier writings of Jean-Francois Lyotard who was rather circumspect in his views about electronic media providing new art forms, in particular asking whether a computerised interactive art is possible. She states, "Digital technologies destroy a fundamental characteristic of aesthetic feeling: a state of subjectivity that Lyotard calls *passibility*".[344] In other words, he advocates digital imaging leaves no room for the immediacy of sensation or presence of the subject. And furthermore, the promise of interactivity would merely introduce more action or intervention which denies passibility. Van de Vall, however, proposes that interactivity can indeed promote states of passibility with new modes of receptivity together with new forms of sensation that need not be diminished in value or importance because of the application of digital technologies. Furthermore, the intervention of the user can become part of the interactive art form as the locus of imaginative involvement and presence in a virtual setting.[345] This last point is important for this thesis in understanding the significance of the virtual identity, an image of an embodied self or avatar, created by a user online when moving beyond the self.[346]

Belk comments such digital re-embodiments of the mind and body may result from aspirational desires of the physical self or character of the user, hence fictional representations that may otherwise involve real-life imagery. He remarks:

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[344] Van de Vall, *At the Edges of Vision: A Phenomenological Aesthetics of Contemporary Spectatorship*, 135.
[345] Ibid, van de Vall, 146.
[346] The term 'avatar' comes from the Sanskrit word that means 'a form of the self'.

> In pre-digital times, we could try out new identities by buying new clothes or cars, changing hair styles, or cultivating new friends and hangouts. But, in the present digital age, our online physical invisibility and command of the virtual re-embodiment of self-created avatars provide an easier and less risky environment for such self-experimentation.[347]

On a less positive note, creating a fantasy identity of a different age, a different gender, a different temperament may be a seductive way to explore the self, but "over time, such performances of identity may feel like identity itself", comments Turkle.[348] The virtual self or avatar then becomes an unreal reality, a new state of the self in tenuous complicity with other users online in which the fantasy identity then becomes life itself, some exhibiting extreme behaviours.

It is worth noting that fantasy identities are not specific to the digital age. The genres of Japanese *manga* comic books and *anime* animated films were created post Second World War. Animated characters lived in artificial futuristic worlds that created a fantasy cult in which people could act out lives in cyberspace as a means of escape from the realities of their everyday lives. The *amine* character *Astro Boy* is one such example of what would be regarded as an avatar today. Furthermore, virtual worlds in which the dream of living another life or becoming another identity have been the locus of science fiction stories for decades in books or cinema, off-the-shelf gaming socialised generations of mostly young people to the culture of simulated worlds and virtual action identities in the late 1980s and 1990s, such as Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*, and now online in downloads of movies and television shows, such as *The Matrix* and *Game of Thrones*.

I refer to the work of Italian artists Eva and Franco Mattes who construct fantasy identities that may or may not have a connection to a real person and also download avatars from virtual worlds and represent them as portraits.[349] The

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[347] Belk, "Extended Self in a Digital World,": 482.
[348] Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, 12.
[349] Michael Desmond observes these artists are renowned for subversive art works not the least of which was their invention of Darko Mver, a mysterious and morbid artist revealed at the Venice Biennale in 1999.

face of *Eos Rhode* (2007) (figure 112) of a beautiful young woman framed by violet-pink hair looks human, with human features and expression is digitally constructed. Interestingly, an animated cartoon version of the face is placed behind the image, perhaps to highlight that is in fact a simulacrum. Desmond remarks the virtual portrait of *Eos Rhode*, and the two others in the series (*Yamiki Ayakashi* and *Tohru Kanami*) could be considered realistic semblances of real persons but in digital form as a computer generated avatar. He refers to a published interview with Eva and Franco Mattes who both view avatars as self-portraits "Unlike, most portraits though, they are not based on the way you are, but rather on the way you 'want to be'. Actually, our works are not portraits, but rather 'pictures of self-portraits' …"[350] Audiences would not be unfamiliar with such statements today, as digital self-portraits can easily be fashioned by an artist or ordinary person, whether a likeness or an ideal presence of the self, using digital imaging or fashioning a virtual reality online.

Figure 112: Eva and Franco Mattes, *Eos Rhode*, 2007

An important development in the capability of digital technologies is virtual interactivity, the ability to link up to virtual communities or worlds of users who communicate at will as virtual identities free from the restrictions of the material self. Some virtual or parallel worlds can emulate social structures of the real world, whereas others are more akin to those encountered in computer gaming sites with a multiplicity of views, screens and contemporaneous field of actions.

[350] Desmond, *Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the Digital Age*, 82.

Digital technologies give form to virtual identities and the interactive interface which mediates between different users and the online world. And yet there remains a tension in the understanding of selfhood as people seek a link between the physical and psychological self with the simulated self.

One such global online virtual world is *Second Life* that enables users to interact with other users as constructed personas in a networked simulated virtual environment that acts out imaginary activities at any given time.[351] Virtual worlds offer the user the promise of an identity different in appearance, age, gender and personality from the self, even in anthropomorphic form as a mythical creature or robot. Users on Second Life, however, are required to customise an avatar from digital templates of body shape, facial features and clothing styles which are then open to editing by the creator onsite. The constructed persona can be anything the user desires beyond self-imposed limitations of physical appearance and character. Furthermore, users may have multiple avatars, known as 'skins', for different cyber worlds. Turkle explains "They find themselves assuming multiple personae on computer networks. They are swept up in experiences which challenge their ideas about a unitary self. They meet their double and it is a cyborg".[352] Thus, online experiences of creating multiple avatars supports the notion of selfhood as a fragmented and multiple identity.

While these digital creations may be considered simulations, how much of the self does the virtual identity really conceal or expose? Does the digital realm enable the user to act out desires, predilections and biases that they would otherwise be reluctant to do so in the real world? Turkle further affirms that cyberspace is a place to 'act out' characterological experiments on an exotic stage without the real life consequences. This suggests portraying a fantasy identity online offers the user a promise of anonymity for their actions by moving beyond the self. While this may be so, Eva and Franco Mattes contend, "In Second Life

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[351] The *Second Life* online virtual word is freely available to users in a downloadable 3D format from the internet. It was developed in the US by Linden Lab and launched on 23 June 2003, www.secondlife.com.

[352] Sherry Turkle, "Our Split Screens," *Screens* 15:1, 2 (2002): 11.

you are forced not to be yourself, to wear an ultra-modern 3D mask. But masks are not there to hide your real identity, on the contrary they are there to show who you really are, since you can ignore social restrictions".[353] Thus, the semblance of digital avatars may have an uncanny verisimilitude to its creator, and hence can be regarded as a self-portraits.

Figure 113: Eva and Franco Mattes, *13 Most Beautiful Avatars*, Postmasters Gallery, New York, 2006

The notion of self-hood can be understood in an exhibition of portraits of fantasy identities taken from the Second Life online world by Eva and Franco Mattes. In 2006, they reproduced photographic portraits of the avatars from the online world as large digital prints and exhibited them as three separate exhibitions: *Annoying Japanese Child Dinosaur*, *LOL* and *13 Most Beautiful Avatars.* The *13 Most Beautiful Avatars* (figure 113) works draw their inspiration from Andy Warhol's short films *13 Most Beautiful Boys* and *13 Most Beautiful Women* (1964).[354] In these works, the portrait faces of mostly female avatars are profoundly human but have a certain sanitised beauty with big dark eyes, big red lips, small noses and unblemished skin framed by ultra-modern hairstyles. It could be argued that the Mattes are questioning the manner in which female (and male) avatars are portrayed in virtual worlds with adherence to social stereotypes of beauty and sexuality to increase their attractiveness to others. Indeed, the manner in way women are portrayed in virtual worlds is reminiscent of the long held rhetoric of idealised beauty of the Western canon. Thus, the

[353] Desmond, *Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the Digital Age*, 82.
[354] Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Eva and Franco Mattes, Postmasters," *Artforum* (May 2007): 370-371.

Mattes, like Petrina Hicks and Annette Bezor and their contemporaries, highlight how false notions of beauty as a social construct are still being replicated in popular culture. This may explain the sameness and repressed imagery of the female face and body which continues to frame society ideals of female beauty and identity as sexual and decorative objects today. The irony is that anything is possible in virtual worlds, with the profundity of strange visages and forms and yet the faces are remarkably human, is not lost here.

On the surface, the Mattes chose to exhibit the portrait series in an established portrait setting—the public gallery space and not in an online gallery, as the viewer may well have expected given the wide appeal of internet sites and interactive media. I argue that hanging brightly coloured portrait faces on white walls of a public gallery space gives the appearance of being real, with their contemporary styling and seductive poses. And yet these faces belong to the immateriality of a virtual interactive world, an imagined space and not the material space of the gallery setting, challenging the viewer to question their authenticity as self-portraits of real people, and thereby denying passibility. In a twist on art imitating life, the portraits were shown two weeks earlier on the web portal of the New York gallery.

Rather than celebrate or deplore the use of selfies, social media, image sharing sites and virtual worlds, in this chapter I have shown how self-hood is embodied in the networked self that is redefining portraiture in the twenty-first century. I have also illustrated how the portrait miniature mirrors the presence of the selfie on hand-held devices which form an intimate experience with the viewer as a keepsake reminiscent of past eras.

The effects of professionalisation and institutionalisation on the art establishment from the late twentieth century and its implications for collecting, curating and presenting contemporary portraiture on and off the walls is explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PRESENTING PORTRAITS ON AND OFF THE WALLS

By the late twentieth century, the professionalisation and institutionalisation of the art world had reshaped the way museums and galleries were collecting, curating and presenting art and portraiture. A new art bureaucracy of arts administrators, board members and art judges—some of whom had little or no practical art experience—had changed curatorial practices through thematic displays over medium hierarchies, blockbuster exhibitions, online engagement and acting globally. The late Betty Churcher, former Director of the National Gallery of Australia and commonly known as 'Blockbuster Betty', was influential in exposing the art-going public to spectacular temporary exhibitions of art historical and contemporary works in the 1990s. To achieve recognition of their art practice beyond peer review and art prizes, some contemporary artists sought greater exposure in art biennales and triennials in Australia and overseas supported by the art establishment, government and corporate Australia. Other artists created not only the art but also the agenda themselves, not waiting for gallery patrons or the art establishment to recognise or promote their artwork.

What then is the future of the public gallery space for portraiture? Are artists and audiences drawn to online sites and virtual exhibition spaces contesting the value of the museum setting? Has the popularity of art and portrait prizes with the art-going public and artists alike waned? Each year, entries for the Archibald Prize for portraiture are pilloried by art critics generating public debate about the suitability of the portrait subjects, art styles and artistic merits of works. For some artists and cultural commentators, the Archibald Prize for portraiture has become a parody of an art prize not to be taken seriously, even though large numbers of artists submit portraits each year seeking public and professional acclaim and financial reward from prize money. By examining these and other

questions in the last chapter of this thesis, I explore how galleries are collecting, curating and presenting contemporary portraits on and off the walls.

In the first of three parts of this chapter, I provide an historical and present day context of the collection and display practices of portraiture that focuses on the role of the national portrait galleries. Building on an understanding of curatorial practices, in the second part I examine institutionalised conditioning of contemporary art practice by the art establishment and relate it to portraiture. Following on from this, I explore the popularity and merits of portraiture prizes and how they shape portraiture. Finally, I consider the global gallery, how public museums and private galleries are responding to the contemporaneity of the art world and the communicative power of the networked-digital age with unparalleled opportunities for visitor engagement online anytime and anywhere.

Collection and display practices of portraiture

A gallery dedicated to the preservation and display of portraits of notable people from political and public life has been a phenomenon particular to Anglophone nations since the nineteenth century, beginning with the opening of the British National Portrait Gallery in 1856. This was followed by the establishment of portrait galleries in five other western countries, namely the American Gallery as part of the Smithsonian Institute in the 1960s; then the Scotland, New Zealand and Australian national portrait galleries in 1999, and more recently the opening of the Canadian gallery in 2001. This is not to say that other nations do not recognise notable people of the nation's past and present in public cultural institutions. The collection and display practices of these national portrait galleries, however, highlight the inherent tension between the culturally historic significance of a notable person and portraiture as an art form. The aesthetic merits of a portrait may well have been regarded as secondary to history. The role of the British National Portrait Gallery "was to be about history, not about art, and about the status of the sitter, rather than the quality or character of a particular image as a work of art".[355] Its role subscribed to the need to preserve

[355] www.npg.org.uk.

the authority of the portrait as an authentic representation of the sitter and its historic worth with the veneration of British monarchs, heroes and statesmen.

While portraiture in Australia has been historically linked and modelled on British ideals, the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) collection is part of our collective and individual memory reflecting upon what it means to be Australian, our culture and national identity. Although the NPG's contemporary approach to portraiture resists the more prosaic considerations of portraiture conventions, its permanent collection policy remains oriented towards the recognition of the achievements of significant Australians over unknown persons. This often contrasts with its temporary portraiture displays, a dialogue of ordinary people alongside celebrities and achievers that captures the imagination of the art-going public. Through its permanent collection and temporary exhibitions, the Gallery:

> creates a means for people we variously revere, revile or desire;
> those we are most inspired, moved, perplexed or intrigued by;
> those who best illuminate historical experience and circumstance;
> and all of the other past or present-day companions whose lives
> might cause us to reflect on or understand our own.[356]

The NPG is regarded as a nationally significant place of portraiture among other public art institutions in Australia that have long associations with portraiture, such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) with its annual Archibald Prize. The idea for such a gallery was first mooted in the nineteenth century and again by notable Australian landscape and portrait painter Tom Roberts in the first decade of the twentieth century who saw the need for a 'painted record' of the nation's distinctive statesmen for history.[357] Renewed interest in a national portrait gallery as a dedicated place of portraiture occurred in the early 1990s. Lobbying for a national portrait gallery, philanthropists Gordon and Marilyn Darling sponsored an important exhibition of 116 portraits borrowed from public and private collections entitled *Uncommon Australians: Towards an Australian Portrait Gallery* which toured most capital cities in 1992-93.

[356] Gallery History: The National Portrait Gallery and its Collection; www.portrait.gov.au.
[357] Gallery History, www.portrait.gov.au.

The success of this exhibition in part resulted in the establishment of a Portrait Gallery in 1993 in temporary accommodation in Canberra within Old Parliament House, under the auspices of the National Library of Australia. The NPG, as a separate cultural institution, was officially opened in 1999. This is not to say that the creation of the gallery has not had its critics. Ardent opponents, such as commentator Humphrey McQueen, protested against the formation of a gallery in 1992 arguing that such institutions are outdated and elitist. Again some months after the Gallery opened in a purpose built space in 2008, McQueen further condemned its purpose and apparent lack of direction in the quality of portraits and choice of sitters. He voiced his "objection to a portrait gallery for Australia is immanent in its reason for being".[358] A more recent development, on 1 July 2013, the Gallery was established as a statutory authority comparable in structure and responsibility to other cultural institutions in situ in the national capital, and changed its name to the National Portrait Gallery of Australia. Inspired 'to be the soul of the nation', the purpose of the Gallery is to increase the understanding and appreciation of the Australian people – their identity, history, culture, creativity and diversity—through portraiture.[359]

The NPG displays some five hundred portraits from its permanent collection and temporary exhibition spaces at any one time and provides access to more than seventeen hundred portraits online. For example, in 2013–2014, the Gallery presented an eclectic mix of portraits over nine major temporary exhibitions, from the portraits of local musician Paul Kelly in *Paul Kelly & the Portraits,* the social portraits by internationally renowned photographer Richard Avedon in *Richard Avedon: People*, to the annual National Photographic Portrait Prize which had entered its seventh year. Although almost one million people visited the Gallery collection and temporary exhibition spaces, attended touring exhibitions interstate and viewed portraits on the website during 2013–2014, visits to the website exceeded the number of visitors attending gallery spaces.[360] While

[358] Humphrey McQueen, "In for 'Higher Art' I'd Go: At the National Gallery," *Australian Book Review* (May 2009): 41.
[359] National Portrait Gallery of Australia, Corporate Plan 2014-2017; www.portrait.gov.au.
[360] National Portrait Gallery of Australia, Annual Report 2013-14, 23, 31, 150; www.portrait.gov.au.

website visits have increased exponentially, visits to gallery spaces have also risen as an indicator of the perceived ongoing visitor benefits of viewing original works in the gallery setting over online experiences.

To address the role of the NPG as a cultural institution and its curatorial practices, I consider recent observations by academics Chris Beer and Elisabeth Findlay. Beer argues that the Gallery, one of an ensemble of national cultural institutions, is firmly situated in the nation's capital as a central place of political and cultural nationhood. Traditionally, cultural institutions have been orientated to the past and imagined as places of national history telling stories of national 'mythscape'. While this tendency still remains, he contends there has been a recent emphasis on public memory and process of mass remembrance.[361] On the other hand, Findlay considers the NPG in a broader context of national identity, while also acknowledging an emphasis on memory and recognition of the lives of significant individuals.[362] Portraits are important documents that enable significant people and events from the past to inhabit the present through the eyes of the viewer. The very presence of a formal portrait invites audiences to read something about the person, whether it is physical likeness, their status or aspects of their lives, by looking closely at the sitter's face, posture and setting unfolding before them.

Should the NPG collection record more than the lives of exemplary Australians? Just as people collect images of themselves, friends and family, the Gallery collects images of the 'great and good', sometimes the notorious being 'the bad and the ugly' and even 'the ordinary and everyday' of those lesser important figures in society who are not exemplary. The Gallery recognises the merit in the inclusion of the more controversial figures of Australian history, as well as contemporary villains who may not have been paragons of virtue but of vice, anti-social acts and sensational crime—Ned Kelly, Alan Bond to name but two. It may not always be easy to distinguish between fame and notoriety but the

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[361] Chris Beer, "The National Capital City, Portraiture, and Recognition in the Australian Mythscape: The Development of Canberra's National Portrait Gallery," *National Identities* 11: 2 (2009): 151.
[362] Elisabeth Findlay, "Two Faces: The National Portrait Gallery and Academia," *Australian Historical Studies* 43:1 (2012): 199–126.

Gallery is conscious of its responsibility in shaping national memory and does not court outrage in its viewing galleries.

The NPG's collection displays both historical and contemporary portraits of Indigenous Australians and events of significance in the nation's history from its colonial origins to the present day. Early portraits of Aboriginal people are ethnographic being created by non-Aboriginal artists, whereas portraits of Indigenous people by Indigenous artists are at the heart of contemporary works. The Gallery is a place that encourages visitors to appreciate and form personal opinions on the nature of the displays. However, is the Gallery a place where visitors may change established frames of understanding and knowledge on the position of Aboriginal people within Australian society? Academic Melinda Hinkson is not convinced of the latter and has enquired into the participation and recognition of Indigenous Australians in the Gallery's collection and display practices. On one hand, she acknowledges the fractious past, present and interpretations of the future place of Aboriginal people in Australian society and prominence of Aboriginal art both nationally and internationally. On the other, she questions, "What kind of visual experience of Aboriginality has been unveiled before the Australian public in this new cultural institution … does it include the work of Aboriginal cultural producers and subjects in support of a unified idea of the nation?" Furthermore, she enquires "does the Gallery have the capacity to foster recognition with transformative potential?"[363] While acknowledging the role of the NPG to recognise notable Australians and nationhood, Hinkson argues the Gallery is at the centre of a creative collision between portraiture as an art form and the wider understandings of social value and national identity, in particular Aboriginality.

Even so, I contend the NPG's collection of portraits conveys a rich tapestry of the nation, its people and society—there is no one story to tell. The portraits bring visitors face-to-face with different aspects of Australian history, social, cultural

[363] Hinkson, "Seeing More than Black and White: Picturing Aboriginality at Australia's National Portrait Gallery": 5.

and national identity from colonial times to the present. Chapman affirms this view by saying that portraits in the viewing galleries reflect:

> The lived experiences of people – daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, families and friends, teams and gangs, individuals and loners. They present faces of Australia: of Indigenous heritage, of struggles for nationhood, of attempts to define masculine and feminine character. They include stories of arrivals and departures, of social cohesion and social upheaval.[364]

Indeed, such is the diversity of peoples from social and cultural backgrounds that form Australia's national history and cultural identity as a multicultural nation.

Moreover, the Gallery does not seek to shape contemporary portraiture per se but rather to demonstrate contemporary relevance in its collection in two ways: commissioning portraits of social, cultural and historical value, and displaying diverse representations and artistic expressions of portraiture both past and present. The audacious commissioned portrait of musician Nick Cave *Nick Cave* (1999) by Howard Arkley immediately established a contemporary mood for the new gallery. As discussed in Chapter Three, this iconic portrait broke with established traditions of portraiture and cultural heritage at the turn of this century. The larger than life face of Cave placed alongside others, notably the large dramatic portrait of Dr G (Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu) *Gurrumul* (2009) by Guy Maestri, and the striking portrait of Indigenous academic Marcia Langton *Marcia Langton* (2009) by Brook Andrew, instantly command attention from visitors as they arrive at the viewing galleries. Furthermore, the creative imagination of artists and photographers who portray ordinary Australians and heroes of modern individualism using new technologies is beginning to engage the public imagination in its temporary displays. An example of this is the annual Digital Portraiture Award that has fostered new approaches to portraiture using digital media by emerging artists (aged eighteen to thirty years) since 2012.

[364] Christopher Chapman, "In the Galleries," *Portrait 30* (2008): 14.

At the same time, criticisms of the NPG's collection highlight a differing ideology between scholarly and curatorial approaches of how portraits are displayed and interpreted in the gallery setting. Findlay further argues the curatorial space tends to present portraits as biographies of the subject, whereas art historians explore wider historical trends and theoretical frameworks to examine the underlying meaning of portraits as social documents. Furthermore, changes in curatorial approaches during the 1980s and 1990s gave rise to the blockbuster exhibition seen as crowd pleasing, revenue raising events over content, relying on visitor numbers to secure funding for the acquisition of works and economic viability of public galleries. Blockbuster events have continued unabated asserting the power of the 'spectacle' over scholarly meaningful content and social commentary**,** reinforcing a preconceived view of curatorial bias over scholarship in displays by academics. Findlay concludes:

> [Visitors] want to see portraits which will give them direct insights into the personalities of significant Australians and they enter with the belief that portraits are relatively uncomplicated and accessible images … the audience does not want convoluted national thematic narratives or revisionist scholarship they want *illustrated biographies*. Tampering with these expectations particularly in the permanent hang, could undermine the popular foundations of the gallery.[365]

While Findlay asserts the Gallery collection is well placed to exhibit portraits of a nation as illustrated biographies, its display practices are limited in shaping art historical scholarship given the nature of visitor expectations.

The late Andrew Sayers took an alternate position dispelling some myths of the art historical nature of curatorial displays. He accounted for how curators shaped art historical narratives in public institutions. He argued, "It is in shaping displays that curators are at their most influential".[366] In this regard, curators create a vision, a narrative about the art works and art historical content. At the

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[365] Findlay, "Two Faces: The National Portrait Gallery and Academia,": 199–126.
[366] Andrew Sayers, "Curators and Australian Art History: A Personal View," *Journal of Art Historiography,* no. 4 (June 2011): 3.

same time, he acknowledged that few visitors to art galleries read art history, and yet by looking at the displays they are presented with the ambient array of art historical information. In addition, Sayers highlighted the necessity of tracing provenance of an artwork in public institutions which may point to a fundamental difference in the way curators add to art historical knowledge over academia with its spirit of enquiry. He asserted it is curators who shape these public art histories and do so in consultation with art historians, art dealers, the art establishment and artists themselves. Furthermore, he referred to the groundbreaking curatorial practices of renowned curator Daniel Thomas who was instrumental in shaping modern public art collections at the AGNSW and National Gallery of Australia (NGA) (formerly known as the Australian National Gallery) in the 1970s and 1980s. Thomas created meaningful thematic displays of visual art by ignoring the conventional practice of medium hierarchies or cultural categories within visiting galleries in what he described as 'a policy for cultural unity'. This distinctive approach has now become standard display practice in public art institutions, including presenting Indigenous works alongside those of non-Indigenous artists, and contemporary works with historic displays. Senior curator Wayne Tunnicliffe affirms such an approach at the AGNSW, where exhibitions and collections are developed on many levels—whether that is thematic, historical, cultural or experimental—to improve visitor experience and collaboration with artists.[367]

In his expose on contemporary curatorial practices and histories of exhibition making, curator Paul O'Neill validates the views of Sayers on curatorial–centred discourse and display practice. O'Neill throws light on the shift in the role of the curator from a caretaker of collections, a behind the scenes arbiter of connoisseurship, to that of a professional theoretician and practitioner of curatorship. Thus, following on from the work of Daniel Thomas, O'Neill argues curatorship emerged as a creative force of the art establishment that influenced the way art scholarship was communicated and structured around art works in the gallery setting, as well as encouraging audience engagement. His rationale is also understood in the context of the growth of temporary exhibitions as the

[367] Interview with curator, Appendix Ten, 379.

dominant mode of curating contemporary art practice. Although foregrounding the visitor experience in temporary exhibitions he advocates this may in part detract from consideration of the artistic merits of individual artworks.[368]

At a forum in 1999, Charles Haxthausen sought to foster closer cooperation between revisionist academic art historical scholarship and curatorial practice. Acknowledging a gap existed between the 'two art histories' because of the demands of their respective roles, Hauxhausen and others highlighted differences in values, funding models, audiences and professional practices as the main issues between the two. On one hand, is the perception that the university, not the museum, is where art historical scholarship takes place and is challenged by museum curators. On the other hand, is the sentiment that the museum is limited in its ability to shape serious scholarly content because of the quest to fund blockbuster exhibitions. The implication is that scholarship must be imported from the university scholar.[369] Andrew Sayers has clearly dispelled such a notion and affirms that museums engage in the production and dissemination of art historical knowledge and scholarship in essays, catalogues and displays. The exhibition catalogue has become a powerful method of historical and scholarly discourse. Likewise, universities draw on the expertise of curators in teaching art-led practice and art history courses because of a more nuanced understanding of the art object and museum practice.

Although curatorial practice shapes art histories, Sayers says there are constraints placed on curators in communicating art historical information in displays—wall space, label size and attention span of audiences—the limitations of which necessitate generalisations on the subjects of exhibits. However, he clarifies this by saying:

> In certain types of art museums—National Portrait Galleries, for example—the quality of label text can be as important as the quality of the portrait, even though the former appears to be in a

[368] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Massachusettes: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2012), 1–7.
[369] Charles W Haxthausen, *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University*, (Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2002).

> subordinate relationship. That is because in the NPG context a portrait is a synecdoche for a life—and the life must be told. Or summarised.[370]

In this way, he validated the importance of biographical information on the subject, as well as shaping art historical knowledge.

In the twenty-first century, however, a single summary view seems insufficient to capture an understanding of the multiple layers of a portrait work and engage the viewer, given the availability of online access to a multitude of sites and digital content on touch screens, as well as hand-held devices. Indeed, in the networked-digital age, the idea of the curated exhibition model may be rejected in favour of an online evolving space with expansive displays and information, no longer confined to the museum setting that are free of time and place restrictions. Belk contends that collected objects (art works including portraits) become more accessible virtually, access is democratised and there is a greater potential for public input and collaboration by users. He also argues this encourages rethinking about what is a museum and challenges their self-appointed roles as gatekeepers, experts and cultural guardians. Controversially he states, "The idea of a museum as an elite institution run by professional museum staff and a board of directors composed of prominent social leaders has clearly passed". (By this he would mean the art establishment). Furthermore, he argues in the internet age museums must be more effective in competing for and engaging with those it claims to represent—the community, artists and so forth—otherwise they will set up their own art works on virtual sites and effectively become de facto online museums.[371] The latter is evident on video and photo-sharing, social media and internet sites accessed by millions of people across the globe.

While an online presence is a necessity for the global gallery in the twenty-first century, I first consider the effects of institutionalised conditioning of the art establishment (cultural institutions, artists, sponsors and critics) on the art

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[370] Sayers, "Curators and Australian Art history: A Personal View,": 5

[371] Russell Belk, "Reinterpreting Collections through Online Collaborative Participation," (2013): 1-10, www.york.com.

market more generally. Who decides on the creative worth of an artist or artwork: is it curatorial consensus, cultural commentators or the art-going public?

Institutionalised conditioning of contemporary art practice

In the second part of this chapter, I begin my discussion by drawing on recent discourse by Sasha Grishin on the professionalisation and institutionalisation of the Australian art world. He contends that up until the 1970s, the art establishment was dominated by artists and their peers who largely evaluated the merits of art works as directors of public galleries, trustees on boards, art critics and judges of art prizes. By the end of the century, however, an 'art bureaucracy' was firmly in place that turned the art establishment meritocracy on its head. He explains new art professionals with no tangible practical experience of art making and business leaders who sponsored artists and exhibitions dominated management of public art institutions, positions on art boards and art judges, in addition to federal and state arts funding organisations.[372] While it could be argued that this new generation of university trained professionals without practical art experience have become curators and arts administrators, I question whether this has been the case in the senior echelons of public galleries and museums. The late Andrew Sayers and Betty Churcher; James Mollison, Edmund Capon and Ron Radford; to name but a few, had experience of art making before becoming gallery curators and directors, that is not to say that Gerard Vaughan, Michael Brand and Angus Trumble are not consummate art professionals and gallery directors as art historians.[373] Why then, in Grishin's view does practical art experience remain an important

[372] Grishin, *Australian Art: A History*, 479.

[373] Edmund Capon, Art Diploma Courtauld Institute London, MPhil London University, Chinese art c1960s; Ron Radford, Art Diploma, RMIT 1969; James Mollison, Art and Design, Oxford Brookes University c1990s; Betty Churcher, Art Diploma, London Royal College of Art c1950s, Master of Arts, Courtauld Institute London 1977; Andrew Sayers, Degree in Art History, University of Sydney 1979 and art practitioner drawing and painting; Gerald Vaughan, Master of Arts, University of Melbourne 1970s; Angus Trumble, Fine Arts and History 1986, Master of Arts 1993 University of Melbourne.

requisite to judgements about the merits of artworks? In his critique of the 2015 Archibald Prize, Grishin highlights that only three of the eleven trustees of the AGNSW who judged entries have practical training in the visual arts: artists Ben Quilty, Eleonora Triguboff and Khadim Ali.[374]

Grishin reasons this professionalisation has resulted in a certain disconnect between those artists promoted by the prevailing 'art establishment oligarchy' and those who were or are not. To achieve artistic recognition many artists have sought exposure and legitimisation of their art practice in major exhibitions and biennales. Grishin writes, "Quite often those who have been excluded have become the very same artists who attain greatest popular acclaim and sometimes achieve greatest success in the art market".[375] He cites artist William Robinson (a landscape and portrait painter) who has attained a degree of official recognition, whereas artist Gary Shead (a figurative and portrait painter) who has a high public profile remains poorly represented in institutional collections. Grishin argues artists like Shead have limited success in being nominated for prestigious art forums supported by the art establishment because of the nature of their work. This is what Grishin calls 'institutionalised conditioning' of contemporary art practice which creates an agenda that demarcates what is and is not acceptable in contemporary art, including portraiture. He illustrates this important point by saying:

> This encompasses medium – when new media, installation art, performance and photo-based work is privileged over other 'more traditional' art forms – and content, where self-referential irony, for example is held in higher esteem than engagement with social and ethical issues.[376]

This cannot be said of artists who have officially represented Australia at the Venice Biennale: Tracey Moffatt (2017) with her elaborate staged fictions; Fiona Hall (2015) whose creative practice embraces environmental issues; Vernon Ah

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[374] Sasha Grishin, "The Archibald Continues to Underwhelm," *The Canberra Times* on 8 August 2015: 15.
[375] Grishin, *Australian Art: A History*, 479.
[376] Grishin, *Australian Art: A History*, 479.

Kee (2009) whose portraits challenge social perceptions about Aboriginal people; Patricia Piccinini (2003) with her unusual hybrid forms; and Jenny Watson (1993) with her self-portrait works on the place of women in society.

Grishin further explains the unintended outcomes of this professionalisation and institutionalisation has been a general disenfranchisement experienced by the art public, as well as by artists themselves. He contends "much of the officially sanctioned contemporary art scene [in Australia] appears to the general art-going public as inaccessible, arcane, self-indulgent and, frankly, boring, despite the small army of spruikers and publicists … presenting it as new art …"[377] I question this thinking given evidence of improved visitor experiences online and attendances onsite, increased popularity of blockbuster and temporary exhibitions, biennials and triennials, as well as art prizes in galleries and museums across the country.

An annual global report by *The Art Newspaper.com* on attendance at art galleries and museums shows that Australia is a world leader and regularly ranks in the top thirty. In 2015-16, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) was ranked twenty-one with over 2.4 million visitors, a fifty-two per cent increase in attendance since 2012. In the previous year, the NGV was rated thirty with over 2 million visitors. The Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) was ranked fifty-one with almost 1.2 million visitors. The NPG, AGNSW, and NGA failed to make the top one hundred in attendance during 2015, despite high visitor attendance at particular blockbuster exhibitions, but have previously featured.[378] Tunnicliffe (AGNSW) comments while "There has been a noticeable change in how we work using the digital medium and communicate to visitors within the gallery and online … We have not seen a noticeable drop in attendance viewing the collection as a whole. The power of viewing an original work over a digital file online remains—I call this the Mona Lisa effect".[379] Blair French (MCA) also highlights with the completion of the new wing, visitations

[377] Ibid, Grishin, 480.
[378] Gina Fairley, "Australian Galleries Rank Well in International Visitor Report," *ArtsHub* (2 April 2016), www.artshub.com.au.
[379] Interview with the curator, Appendix Ten, 378.

have doubled to over one million a year.[380] (The MCA and the AGNSW partner with the NSW government during the peak summer season to improve international and interstate visitor numbers each year.) The Australian government arts portal shows visitations to Australian cultural institutions reached ten million in 2015-16.[381]

Moreover, the enormous success of QAGOMA's flagship Asia-Pacific Triennials, with its displays of new and exciting contemporary art forms, is relished by the art-going public, critics and scholars alike in Australia and internationally. The the Asia-Pacific Triennials, established over two decades ago, are the only exhibition series to focus on developments in contemporary art in the Asia-Pacific that includes Australia. The exhibitions have played an important role in enhancing cultural dialogue in the region and provide a platform for bringing together cultural pluralism, a multiplicity of ideas and subjectivities, including contemporary portraiture.

I concede, however, institutionalised conditioning may exert pressure on artists to conform to a cultural institution's collection and exhibition policies that govern the subject matter, style and composition because both the artist and gallery are enmeshed in a value system. This is perhaps most apparent in entries for portrait painting and photography prizes.

Portrait prizes

Early Australian art prizes were modelled on British art union sales most with modest prize winnings to raise funds for artists and art societies.[382] Some local Councils established art galleries to acquire local artworks as a historical record of the municipality, with the first being Albury and Mosman Councils, Sydney in 1947.[383] What followed were large private bequests, notably the Archibald Prize

[380] Interview with the Director of Curatorial and Digital, Appendix Three, 334.
[381] In 2015-16 visits to national cultural institutions reached 10 million from 8.8 million in 2012; 38 million website visits: 73% urban, 23% regional, 4% remote; almost 280,000 new acquisitions, and 9% of the national collection is now digitised, "Impact of Our National Cultural Institutions," *The Department of Communications and the Arts*, www.arts.gov.au, 25 May 2017.
[382] The first Annual Art Union of Australia was held by the Society of Artists in 1901.
[383] The Albury and Mosman Art prizes are annual, acquisitive awards of $20,000 and $30,000 respectively.

for portraiture, the Portia Geach Memorial Prize and the Doug Moran National Portraiture Prize. Arguably, portrait prizes have become a barometer of changes in art styles and medium over time that change public perception and understanding about portraiture.

The most venerable of all art prizes in Australia is the Archibald Prize which was first awarded in 1921 with the intention of raising the quality and status of portrait painting and celebrating distinguished Australians. It provided the opportunity for portrait artists to have their work shown in a major public gallery who previously were largely restricted to portrait commissions. The Archibald Prize is a memorial to its benefactor and namesake Jules Francois Archibald, the mercurial founding editor of the now defunct magazine *The Bulletin*. Jules Archibald requested that the prize be awarded by the trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. He stipulated that the prize be awarded "to the best portrait, preferentially to some man or woman distinguished in Art, Letters, Science or Politics, painted by an artist resident in Australasia during the 12 months preceding the date fixed by the Trustees for sending in the pictures".[384] An important requirement of the prize is that the artist must know the subject of the portrait, who in turn, must not only be aware of the artist's intention to paint the portrait but must agree to sit at least once for the portrait.

On the other hand, the Portia Geach Memorial Prize established in 1965 plays an important role in raising the profile and artistic talents of women artists.[385] Geach, however, is remembered more for her bequest than being a respected figurative and portrait painter of her time. Furthermore, philanthropist and businessman Doug Moran created his annual portraiture prize almost thirty years ago (1988) with the aim of improving the craftsmanship and richness of contemporary portrait painting which he felt was undervalued by other portrait

[384] In 2015, the Archibald Prize for portraiture increased to $100,000 from $80,000 in 2014. The Australia and New Zealand bank has been the principal sponsor for the Archibald Prize since 2010 and the newly established Young Archie competition since 2013. In 2016, 830 entries were received from artists, down from 884 in 2015, for the Archibald Prize. While the Wynne Prize received 710 entries and the Sulman Prize 533 entries. The winners of the Wynne and Sulman Prizes are awarded $50,000 and $40,000 respectively.

[385] The Portia Geach Memorial Prize of $30,000 is awarded annually for the best portrait of a person painted from life of a distinguished Australian in Art, Letter or the Sciences by a woman.

prizes in Australia at that time, notably the Archibald Prize.[386] Moran also established a Contemporary Photographic Prize in 2007. Thus, a new generation of art prizes largely underpinned by corporate funding and study awards by way of residencies are in place. Other portraiture prizes include the National Photographic Portrait Prize, Digital Portraiture Award and the Olive Cotton Award for Photographic Portraiture.[387]

It is worth noting in 2013, the AGNSW established the Young Archie competition for young portrait artists from five to eighteen years in four categories.[388] Although not a prize as such, it is a way to encourage young artists to become interested in portraiture, it invites them to portray someone known to them who has played a significant role in their young lives. The competition may prosper and become an award for portraiture for young people in the future years.

I begin by asking who does art prizes benefit? For art institutions the benefits are twofold: first, raising funding for art acquisitions, major exhibitions, administrative and marketing costs, as well as securing sponsorship and donors; and second, promoting both emerging and established artists. For artists, on one hand, prizes can be an ideal platform to showcase their artistic skill and enhance their worth by achieving local, national or international recognition. On the other hand, it may simply contribute to their economic livelihood. Portrait prizes in Australia attract large numbers of artists who may submit their latest work in the hope of winning a prize. It could also be argued that art prizes discourage creativity and inventiveness by imposing the artistic tastes of institutions and the corporate image of sponsors, thus encouraging artists to create an image in a style that is rewarded over that which is not, such is the

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[386] The Moran Foundation offers two major prizes annually: The Doug Moran National Portraiture Prize and the Moran Photographic Prize for $150,000 and $130, 000 respectively. The artist or photographer and subject may not be well-known but must be an Australian citizen or resident for at least one year prior to submitting the entry.

[387] The NPG awards $25,000 to the winner of the National Photographic Portrait Prize, and $10,000 to the winner of the annual Digital Portraiture Award. The latter is now open to everyone over 18 years, previously restricted to young people under 36 years. In memory of the photographer, the Olive Cotton family fund a $20,000 biennial award for excellence in photographic portraiture.

[388] Sponsored by the Australia and New Zealand Bank. The winners and finalists of the Young Archie competition receive art packs and gift cards up to the value of $100.

nature of competition and the art bureaucracy. For sponsors and donors who are associated with an art prize, it may raise their business profile and philanthropic presence in the art world. Thus, the corporate sector is noticeably present in promoting contemporary art and portraiture today as part of the art establishment. When considered in these terms, I contend the plethora of art prizes on offer can have benefits for all stakeholders because they can be a yardstick with which to measure, in some part, artistic worth and marketability of art works both in Australia and internationally, and the public standing of galleries and donors in fostering the arts.

For this thesis, I explore the influence of the prize that has most shaped Australian portraiture, the Archibald Prize; briefly consider the winning works of the 2017 Olive Cotton Award and the Wynne Prize for landscape; and examine the National Photographic Portrait Prize. Portrait prizes connect people with other people they admire, desire or even revile. Besides, people are engaged by the faces they see before them and the stories that lie behind them. Human curiosity about other people's lives is one reason why people view portrait exhibitions and flock to annual prize winning shows.

The Archibald Prize is unmistakably etched into the psyche of the nation. With an ever-increasing fascination, like no other art competition in Australia, entries for the Archibald Prize each year are pilloried by art critics, generating much media attention and public debate about the suitability of the portrait subjects, art styles and artistic merits of the finalists. Fanciful self-portraits or satirical portraits of notable people engage the celebrity culture that provoke criticism or acclaim from the judges, art critics, art establishment and general public in equal measure. The art-going public flocks to view the annual display of portraits by finalists and the winning entries in large numbers contributing to this media frenzy.[389] Former Director of the AGNSW, Edmund Capon, has said of the Archibald, it "is far more than an art award: it is a most improbable circus which

[389] In 2011, 2013, 2015: 147,000, 136,000 and 140,000 people respectively flocked to see the exhibition of finalists at the AGNSW. www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au.

… succeeds mightily against all odds".[390] Despite being overshadowed by contention from its inception and its many critics, the Archibald Prize has retained its currency with hundreds of artists submitting contemporary portraits of luminaries and celebrities each year.[391] Tunnicliffe affirms this saying the public flocks to see the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes in ever increasing numbers each year despite being able to view the works online. Furthermore their success has spurned a lot of other art prizes across the country.[392]

The Archibald is seen by critics and the media as a parody of an art prize, making a mockery of contemporary portraiture and far from its intended aim of encouraging high quality portraiture. This suggests that the original proposition of the prize that it portrays people in Australia of some distinction in the humanities has been lost. Grishin argues the Archibald "promotes a formulaic blandness where the aims are to be noticed, to be safe and to be popular to an untrained eye. Nevertheless, its popular and financial success guarantees its longevity".[393] I contend winning the Archibald Prize may not ensure artistic success but is an endorsement worthy of the moment. Audiences are bedazzled with multifarious styles of portraiture: the grand gesture with large faces of impastoed expressionism, photo realism on an over-magnified scale, homage to past imperatives of likeness and whimsical self-actualisation. Indeed, the painted portrait remains relevant and viewable contributing to its ongoing success, despite the pervasiveness of the digital photograph and growth of new media in the twenty-first century.

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[390] Edmund Capon, Foreword to *Let's Face it: The History of the Archibald Prize*, by Peter Ross, (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2009), 7.
[391] Numbers of entries/finalists for the Archibald Prize increased from 793/44 in 2011 to 884/54 in 2014 respectively, www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au.
[392] Interview with the curator, Appendix Ten, 379.
[393] Sasha Grishin, "The Folly of Thinking Bigger is Better", *Weekend Arts*, *The Canberra Times* on 8 March 2009: 13.

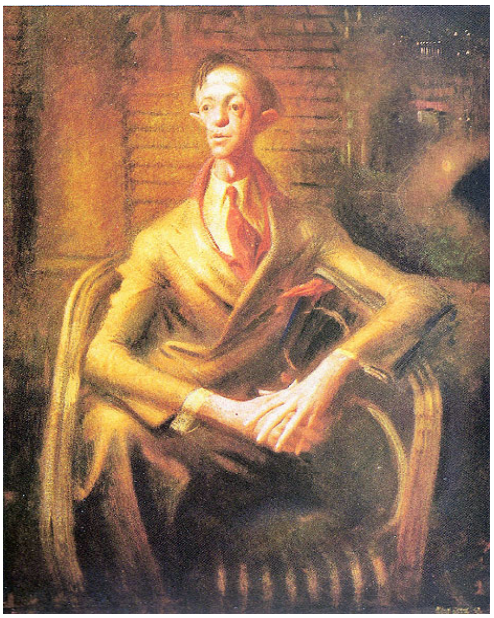

Figure 114: Adam Cullen, *Portrait of David Wenham*, 2000
Figure 115: William Dobell, *Joshua Smith*, 1943

Adam Cullen's winning portrait of actor David Wenham *Portrait of David Wenham* (2000) (figure 114) shocked the art-going public, art critics and media in 2000 with its simplicity of pictorial form and bold painterly style, and questioned public perception and understanding about what is a portrait. Cullen's portrait is in the spirit of the controversial winning portrait of *Joshua Smith* in 1943 (figure 115) by prize-winning portrait artist William Dobell, in which pundits regarded the features of the subject as so distorted that it was not considered a portrait but a caricature. Germane to the concept of a portrait is a resemblance of the subject, whereas, a caricature is subject to exaggerations often used to satirise. A scandal ensued that resulted in a court case about the conventions of portraiture, the outcome of which expanded the interpretation of what was regarded as a portrait to allow for some exaggeration or distortion of likeness in pictorial representation. Indeed, this was an important win for Dobell and artists generally that paved the way for greater artistic expression in the act of portrayal which artists have embraced with fervour to the present day.

Cullen's portrait, like Dobell's, was perceived as straying from the mainstream of accepted traditions of portraiture in conveying mimesis. It was greeted with approbation by the media and art critics and derided as being a caricature, a

pictorial representation of the actor in the role of heart-throb Diver Dan from the television series *SeaChange* and thug in the film *The boys*, and not regarded as an authentic portrayal of the person. I disagree, the portrait conveys a recognisable likeness of the subject but in a bold, informal way. Wenham's face dominates this large scale painting, his pale blue eyes look to the side pensively in a moment of reflection framed by his short cropped sandy beard and blond tousled hair. Cullen's portrait of Wenham has a fresh, spontaneous quality with its use of bold colour and the way the paint is hurriedly applied in broad brush strokes onto the canvas giving it a contemporary vision. Cullen provocatively claimed to the media at the time he created the portrait in only three hours and used commercial Dulux house paints that were inexpensive and bright.[394] Although Cullen polarises art critics and audiences with his rambunctious lifestyle and controversial artworks, his award winning portrait of Wenham "is regarded as a shift from the more traditional painting style" and is seen as a significant moment in contemporary portraiture at the beginning of the new millennium.[395]

Cullen is known for his simplistic, infantile, satirical, and crude art style. His work is not for the faint-hearted: scurrilous and confronting images of ferocious bloodthirsty beasts and angry people; over-sexualised naked and headless women, punk men and guntoting cowboys. In his paintings and portraits, he combined an irreverent satirical dark humour and an honest expression of himself with an astute sensitivity to the ills of society, notably racism, bigotry and sexism. He created a tension, a nexus between spontaneity and confronting subject matter. Cullen's satire made audiences uncomfortable, as he seduced and repelled them in equal measure with his unique body of work.[396]

[394] Ross, *Let's Face It: The History of the Archibald Prize*, 121.
[395] Interview with the curator, Appendix Ten, 379.
[396] www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/adamcullen, www.michaelreid.com.au/adamcullen, March 2014.

Figure 116: Adam Cullen, *Edmund Capon*, 2006

Figure 117: Adam Cullen, *Charlie,* 2011

Much of Cullen's unconventional art practice post 2000, features a mayhem of paint that drips, pools and runs down the canvas in bright iridescent colours, with thick black outlines, chaotic heavy gestural marks and block coloured background. Cullen's expressive approach is reflected in his portraits of two Sydney luminaries—Edmund Capon and Charles Waterstreet—as finalists in the Archibald Prize of 2006 and 2011. Cullen portrays Capon *Edmund Capon* (2006) (figure 116) in his signature style, a humorous depiction of the showman in a simple white shirt with his trademark ruddy craggy lined face writhing in delight perhaps at the latest art exhibition. Similarly, his portrait of Waterstreet *Charlie* (2011) (figure 117), commands attention with arms folded and hands clasped across his chest as he engages directly with the viewer. Known for his serious intellect and colourful lifestyle, Waterstreet is aptly portrayed with an impish face and grin. Cullen admired the prominent Sydney barrister who kept him out of jail because of his problems with drugs and guns. In keeping with his reputation, artist Nigel Milson portrays Waterstreet as a 'giant' dedicated to helping others, part man: part mythical creature, in his large scale Archibald award winning portrait *Jude House Pt 6 (the White Bird)* (2015). His perception of the man as otherworldly is accentuated by the dramatic eerie portrayal of the

subject with long white skeletal hands, craggy lined face framed by black grasses, a white neck tie and black legal robes.

Cullen's Archibald winning portrait "… also brought in a younger audience and encouraged younger artists to submit works. If it was not for Cullen's winning work, we would not have our next generation of artists, like Ben Quilty with his spontaneous figurative portraits of family and friends. He has since gone on to be a war artist but his fresh contemporary style remains", says Tunnicliffe.[397] Thus, it could be said that Quilty was inspired by Cullen's bold painterly style which is evident in his portrait of Cullen in 2006. Painted in his trademark style of luscious thick impasto paint and broad brush strokes, the portrait reflects the mind-numbing emotional state of the subject, before and after, a bout of binge-drinking. Quilty paints large scale portrait faces that are both visceral and tactile. He uses the physicality of thick paint as a building block with a trowel to contour the shape and features of the face to create a recognisable likeness of the subject, combined with a familiar gesture or characteristic pose.

This approach can be seen in the erstwhile painting of artist Margaret Olley, *Margaret Olley* (2011) (figure 118) that won him the Archibald Prize in 2011. His portrayal pays homage to the artist with her characteristic gesture of a raised eyebrow and ever-present hat but gone is the famous art studio full of flowers and striking coloured art works with many still in progress, so evident in her own paintings. The subdued palette and pale white skin expresses the physical frailty of the artist shortly before her death but not her emotional stoicism. Olley looks to the side, in a moment of defiance perhaps unwilling to acknowledge her failing health to the viewer. Dobell painted his second Archibald award winning portrait of the artist *Margaret Olley* (1948) (figure 119) who is seen seated in her throne-like chair, full-bosomed and vivacious, wearing a hat and costume of translucent white parachute silk and an old wedding dress. Olley gives a faint smile and hint of a raised eyebrow to the audience. The portrait style is reminiscent of Gainsborough with its eighteenth century opulence and golden tones and of marked contrast to Quilty's simple painterly style.

[397] Interview with the curator, Appendix Ten, 379.


Figure 118: Ben Quilty, *Margaret Olley*, 2011

Figure 119: William Dobell, *Margaret Olley,* 1948

The Archibald Prize for 2017 once again sparked controversy with the simplicity of the winning portrait of artist *Agatha Gothe-Snape* by Mitch Cairns (figure 120). Akin to the expressionistic painterly style and palette of the early twentieth century avant-garde with its rich vibrant red background and colours of blue, green and yellow, Cairns creates form and space with colour. Like Henri Matisse before him, the simple blocks of colours and decorative effects dismayed the public and art critics. The green stripe down the nose is reminiscent of the effect to create light and shadow on the face in a painting of his wife *Portrait of Madame Matisse (The Green Stripe)* by Matisse in 1906. Matisse was regarded as the leading artist of *The Fauves*, called the wild beasts for their non-realistic form and use vivid colour. In response to media criticism and public commentary of the moment, the two-time Archibald finalist denied the distorted figure was doing yoga and explained he composed the portrait of his partner 'with love' which reflects the many facets of their relationship and domestic lives together.

Figure 120, Mitch Cairns, *Agatha Gothe–Snape*, 2017

Moreover, there is a growing trend towards self-portraits with almost a third of the finalists (ten of forty-three) in the 2017 Archibald Prize. In the era of the selfie and social media, it is surprising that artists are expressing themselves on canvas with humour, pragmatism and poetics in growing numbers. Tunnicliffe disagrees, artists are choosing to portray themselves, family and friends over celebrities and prominent people or a less willing subject seeking flattery.[398] Whether it is an honest appraisal of likeness or an expression of the ego-ideal, the painted self-portrait shows a vulnerability of how the artist sees oneself to the art-going public that is more often mediated in a selfie. A self-examination can reveal some surprising results on canvas, as shown in this thesis—Storrier (figure 92), Barton (figure 94), Bezor (figure 101), Sharpe (figure 103) were winners and finalists in previous years.

At the same time, controversy surrounded the winning portrait of the 2017 Olive Cotton Award for Photographic Portraiture by Justine Varga. The portrait *Maternal Line* (2017) comprises scribbles with pens and marks of saliva made by her grandmother onto a piece of photographic film. A debate ensued between the judge and media about whether the representation of the artist's grandmother is a portrait because it does not show a recognisable human

[398] Interview with the curator, Appendix Ten, 380.

likeness of the subject. It is considered the antithesis of a traditional portrait. People identify with faces and when the face is absent or hidden in a portrait it creates an unease in the mind of the audience. Furthermore, a camera was not used in the production of the image, provoking a further debate about whether the image could be regarded as a photograph, and hence a photographic portrait. In our selfie driven culture, the act of taking a digital selfie on a hand-held device still involves a camera. The winning portrait demonstrates a new way of thinking about portraiture and asks audiences to challenge their preconceived ideas and be open minded in their understanding of what is a portrait today.

In keeping with this, I draw a further distinction with the 2017 Wynne Prize for landscape that was awarded to Indigenous artist Betty Kuntiwa Pumani for her painting *Antara* (2016) of her late mother's country in remote South Australia. I contend this painting is a portrait of her spiritual connection to country, her mother's land and not simply a portrait of the landscape.

Moreover, I examine the National Photographic Portrait Prize and its contribution to the genre over ten years. Established in 2007 by the NPG, the annual prize followed on from the discontinuation of the Australian Photographic Portraiture Prize by the AGNSW in the previous year, after a short duration (2003–2006). Overshadowed by the more popular Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes, the photographic portrait prize which coincided with these established annual awards failed to secure sufficient viewer interest. The NPG, however, has successfully established an annual presence with its photographic portrait prize with audiences and artists alike. Photography features prominently in the Gallery's collection and temporary exhibition calendar. This in part may have led to the increased popularity of the National Photographic Portrait Prize with the Australian people, as well as interest in temporary exhibitions by renowned Australian and international photographers. The NPG is viewed as a more appropriate host for such a prize, given its focus on portraiture as a national cultural institution which is consistent with photographic portraiture prizes having been hosted by national portrait galleries in Britain and America for over a decade. And yet, the democratic character of the photographic portrait prize, whereby the photo-artist may portray any

subject, is at odds with the collection policy of the NPG which focuses it permanent collection on notable Australians.

What is also surprising is the newness of these photographic portraiture prizes given that photography as a medium has been in existence for more than 150 years, and portraiture for much, much longer. This is despite the existence of numerous smaller-scale photographic prizes that dominate the photography scene more generally.[399] Nevertheless, there is little doubt that photography is the most pervasive and popular medium of contemporary portraiture.

Unlike the allure of the Archibald Prize fewer portraits of prominent people and celebrities are submitted for the National Photographic Portrait Prize (NPPP). It is not judged on the reputation of the photographer or the significance of the subject but rather on what and how the image communicates something about the subject and society today. There are no specific thematic restrictions. Each year professional photographers and ordinary people submit portraits to be judged, by two curators at the NPG and a guest photographer. In 2015, 2500 entries were submitted digitally via social media, almost double that of previous years.

Year on year, the NPPP showcases photographic portraits that offer a distinctive vision of Australian society and everyday lived experience that delight, amuse or shock the viewing public. Audiences may seek some connection to the subject of the portraits—fame, empathy or simply look curiously upon the circumstances captured or narrative imposed upon them. There is evidence of poetics, potent realism and unwavering sentiment, as portraits convey something about the human condition—desires, anxieties and elations; emotional and physical disability; youth and age; birth and death. Some subjects look away from the camera, others do not; many fail to raise a smile, expressionless, whereas

[399] The Olive Cotton Award for Photographic Portraiture, a biennial award for excellence in photographic portraiture, was launched in 2005 at the Tweed Regional Gallery. The William and Winifred Bowness Photography Award was established in 2006 to promote excellence in photography. It is managed by the Monash Gallery of Art Foundation in Victoria.

humour and fantasy add a surreal twist. Much like other portrait prizes, it also courts controversy about the merits of the winning portraits and finalists.

Besides the predilection towards the traditional and banal commentary, there have been intriguing images of people: a woman dressed in exotic clothes (*The Living Room*, 2012), a man covered in tattoos of faces (*Man of Many Faces*, 2014), and a print maker standing with his subjects like a taxidermist (*the Lino Hunter*, 2015). Others have enticed the judges with their inventiveness in crafting a fantasy identity (*Napoleon 1–Emperor of the French*, 2010) and (*Hyena (Anita Lester,* 2010). The latter, a weird and wonderful image of a woman in period clothing riding upon a large spotted hyena is set against a dark verdant background (figure 121). The meaning behind the portrait by Danny Cohen is obscured by the strangeness and beauty of the portrayal, although it could purport to be an historical parody of women's roles in society. Cohen offers some explanation: that "creating completely original work excites me. I want to construct photographs that have never been seen before – new weird and wonderful photographs".[400] The status of the subject appears incidental, as she glances confidently at the viewer as if riding a hyena is an everyday occurrence in her imaginary surreal world.

Figure 121, *Hyena (Anita Lester)*, Danny Cohen, 2010

[400] *National Photographic Portrait Prize 2011*, exhibition booklet, (Canberra: National Portrait Gallery, 2011): 40.

Some portraits have a heightened naturalism observing the human presence within the landscape, beachscape, garden, chaotic or minimal interiors. Other portraits document significant moments in people's lives with unembellished frankness or uncompromising intensity—parenthood, illness, surgery, grief from the loss of a loved one. Such sobering images of courage, hope and love have become a staple of the entries for this photographic award. Many of these portraits have a contemplative, introspective element that seem to capture something of the subject's emotional state or isolation. The winning entry for 2013, *Yhonnie and Indianna* (2012) (figure 122), expresses a tender moment, a sadness for Yhonnie as she contemplates the death of her aged cat Indianna, shortly before her passing. The composition is of a quiet intimate moment and the fragility of life. Similarly, Heather Fernon's arresting portrait *Shirley and the Kookaburras* (2012) (figure 123) of an elderly woman hunched over and seemingly headless, shuffling along the corrider of a nursing home, is a study of aging and mortality.

Figure 122: Janelle Low, *Yhonnie and Indianna*, 2012
Figure 123: Heather Fernon, *Shirley and the Kookaburras*, 2012

Neither of these two portraits appear highly stylised or altered by the photographer but rather record the pathos of everyday life. This is in contrast to the earlier photograph of the woman riding the hyena which is digitally constructed. The pictorial elements of the image can be enhanced by the

photographer with the use of digital imaging techniques to create effect or craft an image of a subject. Photographers, like portrait artists, may use props to add meaning to the image. The subject is generally depicted at the centre of the image, some face the camera gazing directly into the lens, while others look away which may leave the viewer to wonder whether the person was aware of the camera at the time that the photograph was taken, thereby creating an illusion of a spontaneous moment—not a pre-arranged reality. Thus, the composition of the photograph, background and symbolism all add to the narrative.

Figure 124: Brett Canet-Gibson, *Jessica*, 2014
Figure 125, Katherine Williams, *Barry & Alkirra – The House of Carrington*, 2014

The role that digital photography plays in contemporary portraiture is well recognised as challenging the painted portrait as the medium of choice in gallery spaces today. Painting has become like photography and photography has become like painting. Exhibitions of large-scale photographic digital prints devoted to the gallery spectacle, like salon paintings of past eras, are now commonplace. Nevertheless, the painted portrait remains integral to the genre of portraiture. As a finalist work in 2015, the silent still power of the large digital print *Jessica* (2014) (figure 124) has an illusion of being a painting. The girl's

white hair frames her face of porcelain white skin with just a hint of colour in her blue-green eyes and pale lips, and the white shirt contrasts to the dense black matt background. Like the traditions of a Renaissance painting, the subject appears as a modern Madonna with her pale ethereal beauty, almost ghostly as she quietly glances to the viewer expressing a quiet confidence in meeting their gaze. The subject appears pensive, suggesting the portrait is part of a larger narrative about the sitter. And yet contemporary photographic portraiture struggles with the historical perception that it captures a moment in time, only to be overcome by digital manipulation.

Again, in 2015, sentimental images of Australian domestic life at home, at the beach, sporting games, a night out on the town with friends captured the human experience. Gone were the disturbing images of 2014, no depressed man sitting in front of an open oven smoking a cigarette that hints at something more dark than a burnt meal in *Untitled* (2013) by David Apostol; or heroin addict visibly 'shooting up' in a car in *Closer to Heaven* (2013) by Molly Harris. Instead, the viewer was transfixed by the faces of *Barry & Alkirra* (2014) shown at figure 125. A mix of vulnerability and tenderness is observed in the face of Barry, a teenage father of seventeen years, seen cradling his newborn baby daughter Alkirra who perhaps is yawning, crying or giggling. The black and white image accentuates the poignancy of the moment of innocence and youth which is not lost here of an adolescent boy bringing up another child (with her teenage mother) and the empathy toward the boy felt by the viewer.

Remarkably in 2016, nineteen of the forty-nine finalists (forty per cent) were images of children and teenagers—playing by themselves or with other kids and animals, in the garden, at side-show alley, wearing fancy dress, and of course faces of childhood innocence. The image of chubby sisters *Isla and Elki role play as princesses* (2015) by Natalie Grono emphasises two sassy young girls play-acting as princesses, one with hands on her hips, the other with arms by her side, and their shadows dance on the (castle) wall behind them. If the photographer had chosen a colour portrait of the girl's wearing their colourful pretty party dresses and crowns on their heads over black and white, the impact of the image with the intense stares on the girls faces and body language would have been

lost. Similarly, the image of the *Free range cousins* (2015) (figure 126) by Jennifer Stocks show nine cousins of various ages and sizes playing-up in front of the camera in the middle of a paddock. Some of the cousins are mildly amused at the silly antics of the boy fourth from the left 'goofing around' and the boy fourth from the right wildly dancing or goading the photographer, whereas batman and his cousin wrestling with a dog appear disinterested, in what could be an everyday occurrence for children, and their parents, during the school holidays. Moreover, the portrait of *The Little Beachcomber* by Nicholas Samartis symbolises our beach culture. A four-year-old boy with golden tanned skin and sand on his face and body stands in the hot summer sun, looking out to the surf as the breeze ruffles in his hair, the blue sky and white fluffy clouds seen above him—this is his moment in the sun.

Figure 126, Jennifer Stocks, *Free Range Cousins*, 2015

After ten years and nine prizes (no prize was awarded in 2008) I contend the National Photographic Portrait Prize has not changed public perception about the role of portraiture in society. Year on year people are overwhelmed by the sentiment, nostalgia or heartbreak of what they see or are uninspired by banality of everyday life, there are instances of technical mastery and excellent composition and photographers wanting to tell a different story to what has gone before but it would be fair to say that few of the thousands of portraits viewed have changed people's understanding of what is a portrait. The portrait prize

showcases human curiosity about who is and what is important in people's lives at the moment in a conventional way using verisimilitude of the subject. In the era fond of reducing images to selfies on social media, these photographers invite the public into their space and confronts them with reality of what happens or fantasies of what they would like them to believe actually happened, in thoughtful, seductive and witty expressions. The prize captures the public imagination of everyday life in the frame and in doing so, confirms or shapes people's understanding of our nation, people and society through the power of photographic portrait.

The global gallery in the digital age

In the twenty-first century, museums and galleries in Australia are presenting contemporary art and portraiture both on and off the walls in an increasingly digital and global context. More than ever galleries and museums are embracing a multiplicity of contemporary art and portraiture from around the world and engaging with audiences, artists and art historians online and through interactive media and virtual spaces.

While the biennale phenomenon can be viewed as reflective of contemporaneity, diverse cultural practice and artistic production, world expositions risk becoming an endless roadshow of 'national participations' regarded more as a promotional platform than a fusion of global contemporary creative endeavour. The Venice Biennale is the most prestigious event on the global arts calendar with more than seventy participating nations that vie for the attention of the art world and global media. Given the limited numbers of artists and curators who participate in such events, it raises questions about the fixed notion of the grand exhibition format as a primary site of scholarly discourse about global contemporary art and culture. Thus, it would be wrong to assume any universality of the biennale spectacle in our understanding of global art practice, despite the recent realignment of the global art world that is now more transcultural than transnational.

A global display of contemporary images does not undermine national identity nor diminish the historical preservation of cultural heritage which is central to many museum collections but may enable a convergence of artistic expression that transcends nations. The deterritorialisation of art practice as espoused by Ian McLean brings with it art embodied in shifting borders and diasporas and less of nations. Contemporary Aboriginal art is seen in the context of both cultural and national identity, as well as locality in that it is distinctively Australian but also part of the global art world.

The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), with its striking architecture and art installations of controversial old and contemporary art, is a major private museum in Australia that exhibits art works regardless of national origin, culture or style of work, that is, transcultural not transnational in its approach. The museum space is as much a 'work of art' as it is a reflection of the 'freakish' mind of its owner wealthy mathematician, gambler and art collector David Walsh who opened the lavish $200 million museum to the public in 2011. Walsh is a new breed of gallery directors, art patrons and philanthropists who combine their intellect, passion for art collecting and considerable personal resources to create controversial museum spaces that challenge the art establishment status quo. I liken Walsh to Australian Judith Neilson of White Rabbit Gallery fame in Sydney and other global private museum owners.[401] Since 2000, more than 225 major private museums of contemporary art have opened across the globe to showcase their own taste and vision, challenging the vision of public-funded cultural institutions.

Although portraiture features indirectly in this unconventional museum space, with its dark evolutionary themes of sex and death signified by two crosses (x and +) in fluoro hot pink against a black background, and its pluralism philosophy, MONA is pertinent to the discourse on the global gallery. Walsh has

[401] George Pendle and Fiammetta Rocco, "Modern Medicis" *The Weekend Australian Financial Review*, 30 April-1 May 2016, 48–49. Japanese billionaire Soichiro Fukutake built a series of museums on the island of Naoshima and two other islands in Japan; Chinese Wang Wei and Lui Yiqian exhibit a vast collection of twentieth-century revolutionary art in Shanghai; and Dash Zhukova founded the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow.

a view that sex and death predominate in art, hence, becoming both subject matter and motive for the museum's creation.[402] Many of the works across the three levels of the museum set out to challenge, and in some case offend the sensibilities and senses of visitors, as they transgress convention: the sight and smell of a simulated human digestive installation *Cloaca Profession* (2010), seventy-seven *Cunts … and other conversations* (2008–09), phalluses, coffins, carcasses and all manner of body parts in all their realism. Nevertheless, an eclectic mix of new and old portraits of men and women are displayed casually along one wall, some in various states of nakedness and sexual expression. Seen here are works by Polly Borland and Del Kathryn Barton who expose the female body to the visitors' gaze. Borland's series of a *'giantess' Bunny* (2004–05) photographed naked with or without large pink spots over the body, deconstructs the ideal Playboy bunny girl centrefold into a childlike sexual innocence. Borland's art practice straddles commercial and portrait photography that flirts with beauty and perfection in a strange and beguiling manner. Barton's self-portrait *Making Love with Love* (Version 1) (2004), in pen and wash, exposes an image of her female genitalia urinating into a stream consistent with her pictorial portraits of female sexuality and motherhood.

Figure 127, Andres Serrano, *David Walsh*, 2010

[402] Adrian Franklin, *The Making of MONA*, (Melbourne: Penguin, 2014), 198.

Of the seventy-seven portraits acquired for the NPG collection in 2013–2014, I question whether the seated naked photographic portrait of David Walsh *David Walsh* (2010) (figure 127) reflects the 'no holds barred' approach of the museum owner to his own life and unconventional museum space or that of the equally controversial artist Andres Serrano of *Piss Christ* fame.[403] Perhaps is it more simply a naked portrait of Walsh disarmingly frank in its simplicity to influence viewer perceptions that he has nothing to hide given the recent controversy over his gambling and financial affairs or a self-mocking exegesis? Walsh is a man known in the media for his extraordinary mental agility as a mathematician and risk-taker. Sitting upright with his hands on his knees, Walsh appears to engage the public gaze, albeit a little uneasily but in fact he looks slightly above the lens. There is no coincidence that this is a public performance in which he seeks to guard against his own vulnerability in exposing his nakedness. Walsh does not exhibit a physical prowess, a muscular body of an elite athlete but that of an ordinary man.

At the same time, MONA's approach hastens new ways of creative thinking about curating and presenting both old and contemporary art in the gallery setting and online. As the visitor would expect, gallery information is communicated in a humorous, irreverent and pragmatic way further setting this museum apart from other more established modes of curatorial expression and gallery spaces. The Museum flouts convention, there are no labels offering art historical explanations of artworks, installations or artists on walls, as visitors are encouraged to wander a warren of spaces with no linear pathways to view art objects in a dimly lit 9,500 square metre subterranean world, at will. Here visitors do not gaze at portraits on white or coloured walls in a plethora of rooms and accessible only along long corridors. Inspired by the Sloane Museum in London and Le Palais de Tokyo in Paris, Walsh has broken with convention by

[403] American photographer Andres Serrano became famous for controversial works of art, including *Piss Christ* (1987), a red tinged photograph of a crucifix submerged in a glass container of what was purported to be the artist's own urine. His exhibitions often inspired angry reactions from audiences and critics, no less cultural and religious sensitivities and the church hierarchy. In 1997, the work was vandalised at the NGV during an exhibition of contemporary works. David Walsh purchased the equally controversial work *The Holy Virgin Mary* by artist Chris Ofili which caused a scandal in New York in 1999.

creating an 'anti-museum' of seemingly grotesque objects and disconnected spaces, one that "changed the museum environment itself: not just its architecture and interior, but its ambience, its warmth and humanity, its accessibility, its allure, its purpose, its delivery—and critically, its dependence on the wall label", says Adrian Franklin.[404] Walsh uses the latest technologies available on hand-held devices and digital touch screens that provide images and audio-visual commentary on exhibits, including conflicting opinions by Walsh himself as a tool to provoke visitor responses to artworks. Cultural commentators may discount these innovations as nothing more than digital labels. At the same time, after browsing the exhibits visitors can choose to receive information by email, internet and social media expanding the experience and memory of the visit.

Like MONA, the MCA is adapting to the challenges of the networked-digital age by aligning its curatorial and digital functions to forge better connections between curatorial practice, artists and visitor engagement. The Museum is trying to provide a fuller visitor experience through the website by linking collections and exhibitions rather than only presenting works digitally online. Blair French explains that education teams communicate live online with children in remote areas, artists work directly with communities onsite in Western Sydney (C3West project), and artist-led programs are accessible through the internet. In addition to multiple points of access to art works and resources online, French highlights social media is changing the way people consume and produce material. A major focus of the MCA is young people through the Generation Next program where teenagers get together and devise their own cultural activities two-three times a year. As a key point of distinction, the MCA strives to be different by collecting and exhibiting less common Australian and international contemporary artists.[405]

In this thesis, I argue the communicative power of the networked-digital age is disrupting conventional ways of collecting, curating and presenting portraits by

[404] Franklin, *The Making of MONA*, 87.
[405] Interview with the Director, Appendix Three, 327-336.

offering unparalleled opportunities for visitors to access global art collections in different ways. The global museum of the twenty-first century is a new kind of place that engages visitors anytime and anywhere.[406] The addition of the virtual gallery to the mix provides a creative alternative to viewing artworks in the gallery setting or browsing online. Art collections of Australian national cultural institutions, state and territory galleries and museums are accessible through their websites, and a multitude of internet and social media sites. Online platforms and mobile applications enable visitors to access curated exhibitions, artworks, virtual art tours or create their own tour viewing their favourite art works from the gallery collection.

The popularity of portrait prizes with the art-going public and artists alike has not waned despite the annual debate about the suitability of the portrait subjects, art styles and merits of winning works, and the pervasiveness of the digital photograph. Notwithstanding being overshadowed by contention, portrait prizes remain an appropriate platform to showcase contemporary portraiture, with some institutions openly encouraging creativity and inventiveness in medium, style and content with some surprising results that is changing public perception and understanding about what is a portrait.

[406] The NGA led the way in 2012 with the Google Art Project in Australia which provides virtual access to parts of its collection in super high resolution and minute detail. Five other Australian galleries have since joined—Art Gallery of New South Wales, Museum of Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Museum, and Griffith University Rock Art Research Centre. The Project is an example of how new technologies can increase access to art collections with seamless virtual walkthroughs of gallery spaces.

CONCLUSION

Having examined contemporary portraiture against two simultaneous themes of inquiry and considered four research questions, I affirm the central argument of this study that portraiture is becoming increasingly ambiguous and fragmented in form, style and subject matter in response to the growth of digital imaging and proliferation of new media forms. Since the 1990s, there has been a dramatic change in the nature of contemporary portraiture driven by newer and newer technologies and the selfie inextricably intertwined with the seductiveness of social media. The networked-digital age has empowered contemporary artists to embrace a range of new media rather than succumb to established methods of representing the subject. Digital imaging gives artists, and ordinary people alike, powerful tools to transform the image whether it is to evoke a real or imagined likeness of a subject, simply add to the creative process or capture selfies on hand-held devices.

Portraiture, however, remains a synthesis of both traditional and alternate modes of representation in the twenty-first century. A significant outcome of the research is the knowledge that there are portraits that have vestiges of traditional notions of portraiture and those portraits in which the links have become fragile and contestable calling into question what is a portrait. I have established that portraiture is no longer restricted to, or defined by, the specificity of mimesis or authenticity and extends beyond these traditions in new and unexpected ways. I have comprehensively shown in this thesis how and why those portraits that engage an ambiguous or fragmented nature of representation are suffused with new meanings. It is unsurprising then that fantasy portraits with their underlying falsehoods, and journeys into the hyperreal with their heightened realism, are now commonplace in contemporary portraiture. Nevertheless, the research has shown verisimilitude remains an important focus of portraiture, in particular formal and commissioned portraits,

reinforcing historical conventions of likeness and authenticity, albeit in a contemporary way.

Expanding on these findings, the study has revealed how self-portraits can also move beyond mimesis through metaphor and masquerade in expressing an ideal or fictional representation of self-hood. I have established the self-portrait can be a catalyst for subjective fantasy as a masquerade or a poetic embodiment of the ego-ideal expressed through the language of a metaphor. In addition, I have argued that the self-portrait remains an important medium for the visual expression of female sexuality for women artists who challenge historical female gender bias and cultural discordance as objects of the male gaze in their art practice. Their forays into self-portraits express alternate views about what it means to be a woman, mother and artist today.

A further outcome central to this thesis, is the argument that the desire for social connectedness—being linked up to social media and linked in to internet sites—and the need to take selfies is redefining portraiture today. I have argued the effects of new technologies on contemporary portraiture are undeniable with the seductive and uncanny capacity of digital photography to enhance peoples' lives. People regularly take portraits of themselves and others on hand-held devices and view images online. Arguably, the selfie has become a marker of social and personal identity in the twenty-first century. Taking this a step further, I have shown how miniature portraits are a contemporary visual response to the way people photograph and views images on hand-held devices. Its diminutive size forms an intimate experience with the viewer, similar to the pocket keepsakes of past eras and the presence of the selfie today.

In this thesis, I have also demonstrated that social portraits can both reveal and conceal meanings about individual subjectivities, social difference or distinction—whether celebrities or ordinary people, while at the same time respond to the complexity of social existence. I affirm there is an inherent tension at the heart of photographic portraiture in which a portrait may appear real to the viewer but is a prearranged reality or a fiction.

Of fundamental importance for this thesis, the research has concluded that contemporary portraiture plays a revelatory role in reshaping our understanding of the changing fabric of Australian society, national and cultural identity. It has established that our national identity is a complex narrative of many cultures, ethnicity, religious beliefs and social customs, framed by a history of Indigenous heritage, European settlement and migration of peoples. Artists appropriate historical images and iconography from their cultural past, and those that are culturally familiar in the present, and rework the imagery into a commentary on our multicultural society with new meanings.

Furthermore, an expanding emotional and political subtext is evidenced in the photographic portraiture of Indigenous photo-artists who explore themes of dispossession and racial inequality. These photographers seek to present a more realistic portrayal of Aboriginal lived experience from their own personal perspective, to overcome prevailing stereotypes about the social and cultural identity of Indigenous people using photography as the primary medium.

An important distinction in Indigenous art for this thesis has been the significance of portraits of country that give rise to an alternate concept of subjectivity. Indigenous people's spiritual connection with country has cultural meaning beyond that of the Western notion of individuality. And so, the subjectivity that emerges from Indigenous portraits of country is a marker of cultural identity than the individual by their difference. At the same time, contemporary forms of expression are heralding new ways of seeing Indigenous spiritual connection to the land and people's place within it. I have argued this allows for a more inclusive meaning of portraiture today.

Lastly, I have argued in this thesis that new technologies and the global art world are disrupting established ways of collecting, curating and presenting portraits by offering unparalleled opportunities for visitor engagement both on and off the walls in public and private galleries in the twenty-first century. Despite this, the appeal of viewing original portrait works in gallery settings continues to capture the art-going public.

The findings of this thesis also highlight the need for further research into aspects of the topic. Two areas for further examination are highlighted:

First, there is a demonstrable need for a more comprehensive exploration and understanding of Indigenous portraits of country (as a visual and spiritual marker of cultural identity that gives rise to an alternative concept of subjectivity) which would result in a second important scholarly study and major exhibition.

Second, global trends and new technologies are driving innovations in curatorial practice and visitor engagement which profit Australian museums and galleries. Nevertheless, additional research into online visitation trends and the virtual gallery would further illuminate the dialogue on the future of the gallery space in the 2020s and beyond.

Finally, the outcome of this thesis is a body of knowledge and scholarly discourse on recent developments in contemporary portraiture in Australia from the 1990s to 2010s, of both traditional modes of representation and new art forms, brought about by a gap in knowledge of the subject. Until now no research study has critically examined the juxtaposition between conventional and unconventional forms of contemporary portraiture in the Australian context. This thesis does not attempt to survey the genre but provides a rich and complex thematic narrative that expands our understanding of what is a portrait.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One:	Transcript of interview with Annette Bezor on 29 August 2017.
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APPENDIX ONE

ANNETTE BEZOR

Artist Annette Bezor in conversation with Penelope Royston on 29 August 2017, Adelaide.

PR: Tell me a little about yourself, your art beginnings, what inspired you as an artist? How would you locate your art within the context of contemporary portraiture?

AB: My work has changed a lot over the years. In the beginning, the 1970s and 1980s, my work was realistic, figurative, autobiographical and very political because of the times I lived in. The women's movement was strong all through my formative years at art school. Adelaide used to be a much more vibrant city art wise than it is at the moment. There was a very strong women's art movement and I was at Art School as a very young person, being influenced by all of this. Probably why the subject matter of my work became women, I mean I have painted a couple of paintings with men as the subject but mostly I paint women. While I use myself, my face, my body, my life, I am talking for everywoman. A lot of women relate to my work and I think they buy them as a power object on the wall. There's something about my paintings that seems to give women strength and empowerment.

To find a subject to paint, I'd just need to think of my life. I had and still have a fabulous group of girlfriends here that would model for me and everything just seemed to happen quite naturally. Then I lived overseas where there were many different influences. So, the early works are more a narrative and a story of my life, whereas the later works are different, with many styles and techniques. On the surface it's about the objectification of women, how society looks at women but there's often an undercurrent, another back story to each work that can be deciphered. This started with the 'big head' paintings which began when I came

back from living in Paris for seven years. I got a fabulous large studio space here in Adelaide. Although my work now is different from those early works and the narrative less obvious, it's still autobiographical (being that all work is really autobiographical) but you really need to be given the key to understand it. My work is not very easily accessible unless you are actually given hints as to what a painting is about. I also think it's important that a painting can be appreciated at many levels and does not depend on knowing the intention of the artist in its meaning. One could just like the look of it!

So, here we are sitting in my lounge room and if you look over there on the wall, there's a painting called *The Silent Violence* (2015) which is about the destruction of women's identity within a particular society at a certain time. On the surface it looks very decorative and pretty on a superficial level, there's a lot of gold leaf, fish and flowers but the women depicted are from an old photo of an early Geisha. So what I'm talking about is the destruction of identity within a culture because Geishas were not just happy tea ladies. The title refers to the whole story behind their constructed and often repressive role in society. So you can take my paintings at face value if you like but can also dig deeper to understand what they are about. There is a particular technique I used in this series of works to emphasise the destruction of self. At certain stages in the painting I used an orbital sander in a rather brutal fashion to grind back through layers of paint revealing the underpainting and resembling abraded skin. And so, I make something, I destroy it, I make it again, I destroy it—it's about the fragility of our own skin, our beauty, our sense of self, our life.

Another new painting in this room *Suburban Turban* (2017), is of friend, Gabriella Smart, director of a music company called *Soundstream*. It's homage to the turban that most women wear (wrapping up wet hair with a towel). At a time, when there's lots of discussion about women's head scarfs and burkas. I've made this bloody big turban picture showing a green velour towel wrapped around a woman's head, and we all do it. I would not consider it a portrait as such, although it certainly looks like Gabriella, but it's more a wry comment on what is happening now to women around the world, it’s a common experience.

PR: How long have you been painting these big faces?

AB: Since around 1999, my fascination started with the models used in paintings by Tretchikoff and Tamara de Lempicka, amongst others, because the faces of the models were often passive. So it started off with a desire to represent the women as less passive creatures. I also had just learned to use Photoshop, so I could play with the original images, stretch them, and use different colours. I became fascinated by how actually ugly, other worldly I could make these women and still have them considered beautiful. So that's how it started. I sold every painting I did from that period. It used to just astound me really that people did still find them incredibly beautiful. They were not women as seen in reality, they were no longer human, so in that sense they're not actual portraits but portrayals of women. They became abstracted, they're like abstract paintings that use faces as their subject and starting point.

After journeys to Shanghai and Hong Kong I began painting Asian faces mostly sourced from magazines bought on my travels. Among my most recent works, this series has had a mixed reception when shown. If they'd been done by an Eastern woman, a non-Caucasian woman, I think they would be viewed differently. I don't think people understand what I'm talking about—they're not just pretty pictures of Asian women. And again, they're not so much portraits, even though they're recognisable faces. It's difficult for people to understand why a Caucasian woman would be making these paintings.

PR: So they are portraits of how society views women as objects, sexual objects and for their beauty?

AB: Yes. There's one painting I have done called *Lookers* (2011) which came out of a visit to Shanghai and the way people there were not afraid to look at each other. In Western society staring is not very polite but in Shanghai, when I was with my friend Gabriella who has startling blue eyes, I was just amazed at how boldly women stared at her but also at each other. There was a feeling of competition. They were much more aware of their beauty than I'd imagined and they would wear these glamourous and fantastic clothes to social occasions

reminiscent of an earlier era. It's the 1920's and 1930's again. And so I painted two beautiful Asian women from a fashion magazine positioned in such a way that they're looking at each other, overtly. So the painting is about the fact that women are called 'lookers' if they're beautiful and the fact that they look at each other and they're very competitive. And again, I emphasise the fragility of the skin by going over it with an orbital sander.

PR: You also have series of big heads of celebrities—are you saying that in one way they are celebrated for their beauty, their celebrity status but underneath they live tragic lives.

AB: Yes. Many of my paintings start out with a very simple idea which often seems banal and then it expands in my mind and I work with the idea to some conclusion. I noticed how many green-eyed women had seemingly tragic lives. I'm sure there's a lot of green-eyed women that do not but I started looking at celebrities, the women who had green eyes and it expanded from there. And of course, you mentioned that a lot of these women are not able to deal with the pressure of their famous lives, they implode and the tragedy is that they're often into alcohol, drugs, have bulimia or anorexia or all of these things and it's played out in public. And so I've painted a series of famous women: Amy Winehouse, Courtney Love, Kate Moss and Lindsay Lohan.

There's a triptych of Amy Winehouse *The Amy Trilogy* (2012) which illustrates the series on celebrities very well. So you've got the iconic idolised Amy as *Golden Amy*, Amy as a media target *Damaged AW*, and the private Amy *Face Value AW*, the hidden secret person. All three of them together is a kind of portrait of her social persona and her down fall but it's not saying much about her as a person because how much can you actually say in a painting, really? I am portraying something of her life, the public and private tragedies but I barely scratch the surface.

PR: Can you talk about the particular work *Flogging the Rocking Horse*, it seems to be very different to your other works.

AB: It's actually not that different. It's a painting about futility too. There's a

woman wearing a purple dildo and she appears to be about to fellate it, she is also holding the reins to a rocking horse. The title comes from two lines of the song called *The Be All and End All* by Bic Runga—Flogging the Rocking Horse, and Getting Nowhere. It's a story pertaining to my own life at the time and how I was feeling so it's really a portrait of me. I obviously was having a hard time. I mean artists go through major highs and lows in their professional and personal lives, at times one does feel like you are flogging the rocking horse. So much of my work is autobiographical, portraits of me and of my life. I use my own face and body and I also ask friends to model. Of all the self-portraits I have done, there is no single work that can explain the complexity of my being. Perhaps if all the paintings I have ever done could be seen together in one place it may be possible to, at least, see that complexity.

PR: You use your face and those of the friends as models for your paintings?

AB: Yes. For instance, the green towel painting called *Suburban Turban* (2017) that we talked about earlier, it's about every woman although it shows the face of my friend Gabriella. In other paintings, I or a friend may be the model but it is not a portrait as such. We are stand ins for the concept. Some people say that I look like all the women in my paintings.

PR: You painted a self-portrait for the Archibald prize in 2006.

AB: I didn't intend to put the self-portrait into the Archibald. There's quite a strange story behind that painting, but anyway, it evolved and Paul Greenaway who was my dealer at the time came around and said "Oh my God, you have to put that into the Archibald!" I wouldn't have dreamt about doing that because I don't really like art prizes or competitions, but anyway, I did and it was fun. Looking at this self-portrait—what does it really say about me? I'm not even sure how much it looks like me because I stretched and morphed the face quite a lot. I think the title says more about me than the actual painting. The title *Still Posing After All This Time* is kind of fun, wow, here I am again, posing again at the age of 55! The titles often say as much about the person as the painting itself.

In the early years there were quite a few self-portraits, we're talking from the

very late 1970's right through the 1980's. So that's me in 1986, it's called *Wrestling With The Cherubim,* a painting about me, the boyfriends and the complexity of love. Other self-portraits: *Oh Boa* (1987), *Romance is in the Air* (1988), *High and Dry* (1989) showing a mermaid out of water—as I felt at the time. It's not very flattering!

My work is still autobiographical but less overtly so, now.

PR: Your work is still autobiographical but you are now painting fewer self-portraits …

AB: Yeah, because my life is nowhere near as interesting. (Laughs).

PR: Well, I don't believe that!

AB:Well you know, I am in a different phase of life, there are things that are really personal that I don't want to talk about or paint, like how would you talk about cancer? How would you paint that? How do you paint aging? I'm not even interested in going there.

What I am doing now? I don't honestly know what's next because I've been so ill. I'm just happy to be working again, finishing some half-finished pieces begun before getting sick. I'm not at the point yet where I am thinking well enough to imagine what's next. I've worked figuratively with a lot of different techniques for so long that I doubt the subjects would change much, unless it was an absolutely incredibly abrupt change to something like abstraction. I'm extremely interested in abstract painting and have been for a very long time. Some of my favourite painters are Abstractionists. I do regard the "Big Heads" as a type of abstraction. They are so far removed from reality. That is why I put all those used colour palettes on the wall in my studio, I think they're so beautiful. Just Colour! I also love Aboriginal painting.

PR: But I don't see any evidence of that in your painting.

AB: No, but Aboriginal art is very interesting, the abstract colour field work, like that of Emily Kngwarreye's paintings. So what artists end up doing is not always

smooth sailing, we experiment but we can't do everything that we think we want to do, there's just so little time to experience it all but I am fascinated with abstraction … but I do seem stuck in figuration.

PR: What is the process you go through to create your paintings, you talked about using an orbital sander, what else do you do?

AB: I'd take photographs, pull together, collage all the elements that I wanted to include. So I would know what the painting is going to look like before I started painting. Then I became quite sick of it being so predictable. Once you've got the idea and you've done the photographs, it's all just kind of hack work. Some people really enjoy that but I have enjoyed things that evolved and surprised me a bit more as I matured as an artist. This led to a phase where I let the canvas talk to me which sounds a bit pretentious but I started making random marks on the canvas by scrunching the canvas up, putting it in the bath and pouring paint or stains over it. That way I had simple and unpredictable marks already on the canvas before I started to paint. These marks suggested likely images. So it was a very different way of working. A good example of this is the painting titled *Entanglement Landscape–Libido* (1989).

Now, it's a bit of both, as I come up with new images. I also use laser scans, mono prints and anything else that I can think of. Your skill and experience as an artist will determine how to make a painting out of something weird and wonderful from what's in your head. The point I'm trying to make is that I do not completely intellectualise my work. It is chance and risk and composition.

PR: Can you talk about *Smoulder* those works that fantasised female sexuality?

AB: *Smoulder* (2000) was amongst the first of the big heads that moved on from using the model faces in other artists works to make some paintings. The face in *Smoulder* is from a porn magazine. Just browsing! I'm interested in everything! Anyway, the image of this girl really interested me because she looked so young. I did a bit of research and found out that she was a quite famous pornographic model. So I just focused on her face as a way of expressing an idea about women being objects but how they can be powerful and empowering women. It was just

a fascination. Not everything I do has deep meaning.

There is a painting called *Fleshpot* (2017) and the face is Poh Ling Yeow. She has modelled for me many times for various paintings. It was before she became famous (Chef) so I don't make a big deal about the model being her. They aren't really portraits of Poh even though it is her face. I did show this painting once without the ribbons of colour across it but it looked unfinished, so I came back to it and worked on it again. The ribbons of colour come from the series called *Face Values,* we discussed earlier. It's self-explanatory, you've got a face, you give a human being a value according to their face. Were terribly judgmental about people's physical appearance, especially women's faces and bodies. I loved the ribbons of colour and so it became obvious to me to use it on this painting too. It's all finished now.

PR: And this red circle, what is the meaning of this?

AB: Nothing actually. What happened … a painting has to work at many levels and is more than the concept. The honesty of this painting is that there was a mistake underneath the red slash and dot. I had to do something to cover up the mistake that would also work compositionally. Sometimes marks are just compositional things. As I said, not everything has deep meaning, it's just that viewers don't get to talk to the artist about the truth behind the painting all that often.

APPENDIX TWO

NAOMI CASS

Notes on the conversation by Naomi Cass, Director of the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), Melbourne on 24 August 2017.

NC: The CCP is by, for and about photography. I cannot underestimate the advantage of social media and the internet to market CCP, our exhibitions and programs.

We run competitions using Instagram—invite audiences to connect with artists and images. This is a way of generating a new domain of audience that is much more active than walking through the gallery door.

We teach people how to use Instagram. We assist people with the know-how to upload and share photos, branding, set up a virtual gallery.

The digital image or file is more inferior to viewing the actual work. The photographic images on the gallery walls were taken on a camera with film (analogue with a negative), then printed from a data file onto Elford high resolution paper using an ink jet printer. Using a camera needs a skill not just technology.

Over the last 20 years, there have been big changes in the way photography is created, distributed and used due to digital imaging and social media. Photography is now immediately accessible because people have access to IPhones and they don't printed images. There is also a complacency about storage of images on data files—people don't realise they can lose images. People want bigger, brighter and better images—that hasn't changed. There has been a bit of a revival of early methods of photography, analogue film, and use of darkrooms. There has been the demise of funding for documentary and journalistic images.

Portraiture? It now can express different meanings beyond likeness, sentiment and status.

APPENDIX THREE

BLAIR FRENCH

Blair French, Director of Curatorial and Digital, Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in conversation with Penelope Royston on 11 September 2017.

PR: How has the MCA adapted to the challenges of the digital age? What has been the impact on collections, exhibitions and visitor numbers?

BF: The digital sphere is increasingly important to all museums. When the MCA built this new extension over 5 years ago, it went through significant growth as a museum. One of the things that it did, and this was just before I joined, was thinking about its internal operations—how it functioned, what were the kind of things that were important to us, doing things more efficiently but also holding onto our cutting edge reputation. We restructed the internal rearrangements into four divisions. My title Director of Curatorial and Digital refers to the division that I'm the director of here at the museum.

In the context of your question about the impact of the digital age, what's interesting is that in many museums the increasingly expanding digital teams will sit within the Communications and Marketing parts of the museum. This is because digital, in so many ways, is considered a primary mode of communications and rightly so and as it is for us too. But here in the MCA, the museum made the decision to actually locate digital within the curatorial or alongside the curatorial team quite deliberately. The MCA is increasingly working really hard to get away from operational silos. So the old idea of the curatorial element as the intellectual side has long since been disbursed throughout the museum, particularly, with an emphasis on audience programming. The idea of putting digital alongside curatorial, it's become the creative head of the museum. So, that's why my title exists. I run the curatorial teams, exhibition, collection and management teams, and digital teams.

PR: Would you say that the MCA is unique in placing digital with curatorial?

BF: I would say it's less common. Even though it sits with curatorial, the digital team works incredibly closely with all areas of the Museum: Marketing and Communications including social media, Collections Management in terms of collection material online, Development and Enterprises in terms of supporting opportunities for commercial development for the museum, and our audience teams in terms of the massive amount of education, learning, resource development work that takes place with the digital medium. So, digital is everywhere in the museum—it's certainly the way of the future.

Has it changed curatorial practice, per se? I guess, in the realms in which curatorship exists increasingly as a networking process, as a means of making and forging connections and communication channels, because that's actually a direction in which contemporary artists strongly moved. I mean, the influence of the digital as a sort of matrix for human relationships and creativity is crucial. So, it's impacted on curatorial, even museum curatorship.

So, here at the MCA curatorial is a dispersed activity. We have curators working on online projects, a whole dedicated team working on our C3West project which is artists working in communities in Western Sydney, and so forth. We also have educational teams working at mostly distance education, effectively through what we call digital excursions. So our educators in the building are communicating live online with kids in classrooms via live video anywhere. We have artist-led courses devised solely for delivery through the internet. All areas of the museum are working in that space, so it's had a big impact on curatorial. The changes in curatorial practices in the last 20 years, digital has played a role in so much as those changes respond to the changing nature of human relationships, and changing nature in the way in which we communicate ideas globally—the internet has been critical. In Australia, in particular, they've responded very much to a sense of closer connectivity globally, so digital plays a role in that too but so do cheaper air fares and professionalisation, the idea of curation as a profession.

When I started out there were no curatorial degrees, especially in specialising in contemporary art—they just didn't exist. I can't remember the year in which museum studies program started at Melbourne University. Nowadays you have tertiary education pathways for curatorship which signify that this is a profession. Even 20 years ago, it was in a very nascent form. So, in many ways, the museum curatorship model which is probably 30 years ago, when I had my first museum job 27 years ago (I was 28) curatorship was thought of primarily as a museum gallery model of activity. And those contemporary art spaces where interesting curators and models are developed; they barely existed. So, curatorship changed the territory hugely.

PR: Likewise, digital has impacted on curatorial practice hugely?

BF: I think it's incremental. Well, curating material online, you still have your Google art projects and, certainly, we're all thinking about the ways in which work appears online, how to curate or arrange online, and that's certainly happening at a semi-institutional level. There are some really interesting experimental models with institutional websites, the [?] Museum does this great thing where you can dig into the details of works using various online tools, in a way that it's more difficult to do with works of living artists and respecting the rights of those artists. I think, more specifically, it's social media rather than digital per se, but social media is changing the way in which people consume material and, of course, produce material. And there has been some writing around that within the field of curatorial studies.

PR: Anybody in mind?

BF: Well, I'm thinking in particular of Boris [?] quite interesting essay where he discusses the implications of the model of an audience of producers, where everyone is a producer in that realm of social media. So all of those sort of things is of interest and concern for us and looking at the way in which artists intervene on projects online. We've only done a couple of ourselves and have commissioned a couple of artists for online projects. We're also looking at the way in which collections are presented online. We are resisting the idea of

having to make everything in a physical collection accessible online, at present you can just search for around 4500 objects.

PR: What's the thinking behind that?

BF: Because we don't think it's that's the way to go. Whilst that might be really useful to researchers like you, we're interested in the audience experience and the idea of connecting people to contemporary art, finding a better pathway through concentrating significant information around material. So, we do develop our collection online but anything that goes online has interpretative material and background material about the artist so there's a fuller experience. Therefore, in many ways, closer to the type of information that you would have access to if you encounter the work in a museum.

And there are potentials here for connecting collections. We're very interested in the ways in which you might through one particular portal discover an art work and somehow find ways of connecting you to other instances where that work and that artist exists. This is about linking collections— the question that many institutions are grappling with at the moment.

The idea of visitation and spectatorship is important … we're in the process of building a new website at the moment which will hopefully go live in about 6 weeks. The current website is five years old, which in cultural institution terms is "old age" for a website. It's very much predicated on delivering information and providing resources, substantial resources to visitors. The wealth of material that we've got on our website is phenomenal but it's not really predicated on thinking about the dynamics of the experience of interacting with it and it's not very good at giving you the option to move through different types of content. So you tend to get a lot of dead ends—follow a pathway through a set of information about an artist or an exhibition and you hit a dead end.

PR: So you're revamping the website to improve the connectivity and access to information but also improve the visitor experience—you want them to choose the MCA over another museum or gallery.

BF: Yes, it's about the tone and engaging an audience rather than purely delivering information. Our guiding principle and mantra as a museum is that we have artists at the heart of everything we do. Our educators are artists employed to be educators, our install team are artists employed to be installers. Everything we do puts the artist first in the way in which we operate.

So, if you can't come to the museum and you're living on the other side of the world or living in central Australia, Perth or Canberra … can't come in or don't often come here—what's the experience that we can provide you, for you at distance. That's the idea of a 24-hour museum. What's the role that the website plays—if you can't visit, before you visit or whilst you're in the building visiting, or after you've visited. It has to deal with those aspects. All aspects right across the museum are critical.

PR: Once the new website is up, and say if I wanted to view Jenny Watson's exhibition that is currently on show downstairs but I was unable to physically get here, how would the new website facilitate a better experience for me?

BF: It would be different. It certainly wouldn't be better. I mean, the crux of all of this is we as a museum also believe in the primacy of the encounter with the artwork and through the eyes of the artist where possible. Not to say that maybe one day the thinking will change internally but what we're not doing is 3D virtual tours of gallery spaces so you would walk through as if you were here, pretending your here.

For the Jenny Watson exhibition, you can do a number of audio tours—some artists are doing video tours, but with Jenny we're doing audio tours. When you download the app, you can access key works through which you get a sense of the artist and her ideas, and of the exhibition. You might choose an in-house guide and select one of three tours. You could do the tour with the curator—there are stops throughout that tour but if you're not in the building as you hit those stops, the images of the works would come up. You can get Jenny Watson talking about her work. Say listening to her talk about a particular painting that's about being asleep in New York, the background to that story is that's her

picturing herself sleeping the first night after she's just been offered a gallery show in New York and what that means to an artist. So, that's quite an extraordinary revelation for the visitor.

PR: You mentioned three, so what's the third one?

BF: The third one is we run a lot of programs for young people. We have a young people's committee, we run a thing called *Generation Next* where teenagers have their own committee and they devise activities two or three times a year – I can't remember how many times – they run a Night at the Museum, usually about 800 young people turn up and they run programs for themselves and we, the professional staff, have to stay away—a bit like parents. This is quite extraordinary. So, here, we've got two young women, two young teenage girls walking through the museum and talking about what Jenny's work means to them. I have to tell you, it's pretty compelling. It's that kind of layering of experiences, I guess, is the more important point rather than Jenny specifically.

PR: How will the new website impact on this experience for young people?

BF: The new website just will make that more visually and audibly dynamic and look a whole lot better. It will be a whole lot easier to navigate, you'll be able to find that material better. What I've described there are three tones, as well as sets of perspective, so the artist, the curator, and the teenagers that kind of multi-tonality that we do do around exhibitions etc., we are going to run through the website. So there are different tones you'll encounter because the museum is not one voice; it's not a singular authoritative voice, it's multiple. So digital is a way of conveying that in a way.

PR: So, digital is both a tool and a medium?

BF: It's a platform. Platform is a medium now. It has [?] built within it, from HD video projection through to online art.

As a contemporary art museum, we are dedicated to the work of living artists and our collection activities, acquisition activity, we tend to focus on the work of the last 10 years and we only collect Australian work. We look to collect art in

spaces and territories that are a little bit different from the major state galleries, so that means we should be following all things contemporary. So, we collect difficult things, performance art, instructional works, archives, ephemeral entities and things. We were an early Australian leader in collecting digital works, so we are now grappling with what it means to commission and collect work that exists only as digital code. We haven't quite worked that out yet but it's a key thing that we're working on.

PR: Does a lot of art work come to you on digital files?

BF: Video work does but not photographs they are bought as objects, and there would be the odd other thing which might involve reprinting. We have two dedicated AV technicians that work in the exhibition and collection department and part of that job is to be involved in the acquisition process to make sure we can manage the work we get.

PR: What about photographs taken on iPhones, downloaded on to computers? How does this impact on the museum sector?

BF: We keep all the material on secure hard drives etc. There are things that 20 years ago museums weren't having to think about or probably should have started thing about and hadn't at that point.

People take all these images—they don't own them—they're all owned by Google, aren't they? Once you've posted on Instagram and Facebook you no longer own it. You've given away the rights to all that. There's all those complexities around property rights. One of the challenges for a cultural institution is around our social media policies. We have two things we feel quite strongly about that complicate our lives. One is that visitors should be able to and can take photos of what they see in the gallery which means, of course, that they can post them online. It's the best word of mouth marketing you'll ever get.

But we also believe very strongly in the selection property rights of the artist. So we, ourselves, don't print or publish images without having approved in each and every instance where possible by the artist and their representative. So we

have to talk through with artists, the inevitability of their work appearing and other social media contexts. Most understand that that's a reality of the present day world of social media. That's how we use it. You asked about visitation and I made a comment a few minutes ago—there's still something quite unique about the encounter in the space with the material formed of the artwork, even if it appears in material of performance or video—and not online.

PR: How has the internet impacted on visitor numbers—both online and on site?

BF: Our visitor numbers are now sitting at over a million a year. Before we built the new wing, they were around half a million a year. So, there have been other factors other than digital impacting on visitation. The internet can be harnessed to increase visitation. We have one big show a year but contemporary art doesn't rate right up there. It'd be very hard to know half a dozen artists where you can expect 75% of the population to know. Our big summer show each year is our only ticketed exhibition; everything else is free as part of our general offer and our commitment. Our summer show is part of our international series, we partner with the Art Gallery of NSW and it's supported by Destination NSW, so it sits within a state promotion, tourism portfolio. It's the only one where we have very, very hard attendance targets because they're part of our financial targets.

PR: What impact do you think Sydney Modern is going to have on the MCA?

BF: I think we have a very, very strong brand and a very, very strong profile amongst the contemporary art world. So, I think the way in which we work with artists is quite unique within that institutional sphere; the closeness of our relationship with artists. So even if we put something up in the permanent collection, bring it out of storage and put it up in a room, we'll work with the artist about how we'll communicate—that's not a common approach in a public institution. We're small enough that we can contain ourselves. So I think we have something that's quite unique separate from Sydney Modern. Visitation wise? Who knows. We are of the mind that anything that's promoting contemporary culture in art is probably going to have positive spinoffs for us. At this stage, we see it as something that will benefit the city and us too.

PR: What about portraiture?

BF: We don't look at things in those genre specific areas. Our programming is international in scope, it's predicated on forging connection between Australian and international work, so we will quite often look to contextualise Australian work in the program in an international context or vice versa. It's not happening now, because we have a building full of Australian art which is the other thing that we do try and promote very heavily. When we do international shows, it might be a group show that brings together the work of international and Australian artists, and we might work alongside other galleries. For example, The National was a group show of Australian work we did with the Art Gallery of NSW and Carriageworks. The National had a quite strong, political dimension of sorts, particularly looking at the way in which histories were being rethought in the work of contemporary artists.

PR: That brings us to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

BF: There's no doubt that the large portion of our audience are international visitors due to our location in Sydney.

We have a strong collection of work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, in fact, the first two works that the museum ever purchased in 1989 before it opened its doors were by John Mawurndjul who is the great Australia bark painter. Well, artist works across a range of mediums. And we have some really amazing collections from particular Indigenous communities. We've got the Arnott's collection that was donated to us by Arnott's biscuits which is over 260-something bark works from Arnhem land, two or three communities. So we have an extraordinary array of material. Again, we don't separate it out, so we don't have dedicated Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander galleries; we hang things in relationship to a broader set of stories about Australia and contemporary art. At the same time, of course, having to remain very sensitive to particularities of the works and their makers and their community. It's an interesting process to go through where we're saying we need to be careful about specialities and sensitive to them and their culture but, at the same time, work with that material

in the bigger picture. We have been a leader in that regard. It also forms a really key part of our co-acquisition program of Australian art with the Tate for a five-year period. The first acquisitions were really gutsy, high politicised works by Richard Bell, Vernon Ah Kee, Julie Watson, Gordon Bennett, amongst some non-Aboriginal artists.

We've recently appointed a curator of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander collections and exhibitions, so bringing in specialty skills. We have an Indigenous advisory group that led the formation of an Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander cultural policy for the museum. We also play quite an important role in developing entry level traineeship positions for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander professionals across education, curatorship and digital production.

BF: Here is a copy of our C3 West program and you'll see how embedded that has been for some time in Western Sydney and the variety of communities and different cultural backgrounds there. At the back of a book is a set of documentation of all our projects.

APPENDIX FOUR

PETRINA HICKS

Artist Petrina Hicks in conversation with Penelope Royston on 9 October 2017.

PR: I am interested in the paradox of hyperreality in your work where the image become the reality and not reality itself. You bring together incongruous elements and construct falsehoods of beauty and perfection, why do you do that and what's the meaning or context behind your work? Can you also talk about the influences and inspirations for your works, as well as the process you use to create your photographs?

PH: About bringing together incongruous elements, I was always interested in photography, how I could somehow try to correlate the polarity or difference between two opposing forces. I remember always trying to work out how I could achieve this within just one single photograph, whether it be a push-pull effect where you pull in one direction but it repels in another. So it's about creating the sense of polarity within one image and looking at dualities as well. But it's very ambiguous, so you're sometimes not quite sure what the boundary between the dualities are, sometimes the image looks very appealing, it's soft and harmonious but it's also unsettling. You mentioned before the image of the girl with the budgie coming out of her mouth—you're not instantly repulsed by it, so you can't really tell the difference between what's repulsive and what's appealing or the duality between the potential violence of the image or is it just a beautiful image? The boundary between the two—the girl and the bird—as opposing forces is quite blurred as well. It's a subtle polarity.

PR: About the image of the budgie in the girl's mouth, as an aside I read a statement by an historian from one of the cultural institutions in Canberra who that said 'pet birds quite often pop their heads into their owner's mouths', to me

that's a ridiculous statement. But I have to ask is the budgie real or a plastic one? How did you create that image?

PH: Yes, silly. The girl has a taxidermy budgie, not a real one, we wrapped some cling wrap around the bird's head so she could feel more comfortable to have it inside her mouth. The image was basically done in front of the camera. No tricks. Because I shoot on film, I try not to use Photoshop as much as possible. I achieve the airbrushed look through the lighting in the studio. So I try to achieve as much as physically can in front of the lens rather than edit it later on.

PR: Can you talk about the meaning behind *Emily The Strange* in pretty soft clothes with a hairless cat is this also about the duality?

PH: Yes, I aim for ambiguity but what interests me, what has always interested me about photography is that it's a tool, I can manipulate it. It's a very loaded tool, photography, it comes with a lot of associations. I am always trying to in a subtle way put subterfuge or ambiguities within the image. Whilst, psychologically, we are drawn into images of soft pastel colours and harmony and balance, at the same time I create little ruptures within those images. So it's a pink cat with beautiful soft colours but because it's hairless there's an ugliness to the cat. We want to love the image but we don't feel as satisfied with it so we feel dissatisfied.

Going back before I started to exhibit work, after art school I went into commercial photography. I was working on commercial photography for a while and it was there that I became interested in the image itself. What photography is and its signifiers and how it was used in commercial photography. And I kind of took that into the art practice and tried to make these very appealing looking images that were a beautifully wrapped gift but with something else. When you open the beautiful paper and inside is something that's not as satisfying. It doesn't deliver to you the message that you thought, you don't get the satisfaction that you think you would from the image, or it's so ambiguous that there's no resolution.

If we go back to the earlier works that I had started to make, as a way to vent my frustrations with working commercially at that point in time which is a long time ago, I did start to seek out people to photograph that had what we might perceive to be flaws. So whether that was a portrait of young girl with albinism or a nude study with a girl with one arm missing and so on. Early on, my idea was to present these women in this commercial aesthetic and then my practice evolved into different areas, also exploring the representation of women throughout history in art or image representation whether that's art, photography or moving image. Then other interests came with the human–animal connection. The boundaries between human and animal, how and where does the human end and the animal begin and vice-versa. I use animals as a way to … as stand ins for aspects of the human psyche. Since the beginning of time, we've sought out animals to represent our human emotions. I mean, animals appear in so many books and films, artists are constantly drawing upon animals and we share the planet with them. But we don't really have much contact with them anymore. They've become, aside from your domestic pets, they've become an illusion. I somehow think that I use animals to represent aspects of our psyche or more ambiguous ideals of identity or humanity where the animal and human appear to be one creature. It's hard to tell the boundary between the two. The animal somehow represents an aspect of people's psyche, even my own. But I look at animals a lot and I've always been trying to work out why I do that as well.

PR: Can we return to the girl with Albinism, Lauren who we discussed earlier. Albinism can be thought of as an aberration, imperfect. Lauren has an unearthly and ethereal quality about her which can be disquieting.

PH: Yes, both Lauren and her sister have Albinism. I remember the very first photo shoot I did with them; I photographed the two sisters together and then because Lauren was more available, I ended up collaborating with her a lot. We're quite good friends, she always seems to be a muse or a model that I go back to because she's like this blank slate or blank canvas with her pale skin and white blond hair. She has this quality, an illusory quality to her which lends itself a lot to my ideas about beauty—the tension between perfection and

imperfection. The images end up looking illusionary, more real than real. Whenever she appears in the images, the images take on this otherworldly, fantastical quality where you can't work out what era she is from or who she is, as if in a time vacuum.

PR: Timeless?

PH: Yes, timeless, removed from time. She really brings out that concept in her appearance but also her quality; she's quite serene.

PR: Can you talk about some later works—*New Age* and *Venus*?

PH: I was more interested in looking at the history of female representation in art and photography and I don't aim to have a derivative meaning to the work. So I try to make them as ambiguous as possible. *New Age* is a classical composition. I drew upon Renaissance art with the colours and the lighting effects. She also has the white alabaster skin, apart from a few little bruises on her thigh but she's got this quartz crystal lump in her lap which is a way to physically interrupt the image and rupture it. Aside from the fact there's this sharp jagged crystal, it would have been quite a harmonious image. It's two eras colliding in a way, the Renaissance age and now. I drew upon Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*, the origin of the world. *New Age* also refers to our new age obsession with crystals.

I pick objects that are highly symbolic across cultures. *Venus* represents fertility, the womb and female organs but depending on what culture you're from, it can represent so many things. In a way, by obscuring her face she saying 'I am just a womb, am I just a vagina' … merely to reproduce. That's one way of looking at it.

PR: What are you working on now?

PH: I'm creating some new works at the moment and, again looking at similar things, in particular this human–animal dichotomy which I talked about earlier. I'm looking at the animal as this illusory figure. We make films about them. We write books about them. We make art about them, but we don't really have contact with these animals. They're these fantastical creatures … I am

photographing Lauren with animals some I haven't used before. We've got a goat this time, a little piglet, another one of the little white snakes.

I don't participate in it much but if you think about Second Life avatars—people that play these Second Life games, they take on an avatar, a hybrid—part animal, part human. I just find it interesting the way we use animals as crutches or stand-ins for aspects of our psyche that we can't resolve. The fact that we are animals, we share 99.8% DNA with chimpanzees. So, we like to think we're these sophisticated creatures, but essentially we are animals. If you think about the Christianity where they try to put as much space between humans and animals, we weren't supposed to associate with our animal nature and anything that was deemed bad behaviour which could be associated with animal behaviour. In fact, we are just creatures alongside of other creatures on the earth, and I find it interesting that we think that we're these humans and there's these animals that are the same but we're somehow different.

So this boundary between human and animal becomes interesting and sparks these works. A picture of Lauren holding a piglet, you see the similarities with her and pigs because pigs have very human-like qualities and pink skin. We already have animal–human transplants of livers and kidneys, they can't use chimpanzees because they're a protected species, they've identified pigs as the most compatible with human beings. In the future they'll be breeding pigs for the purpose of transplanting their organs into humans.

PR: Are you going to have an exhibition of these works soon?

PH: I'm currently just trying to finish off those works. The Tanzer gallery in Melbourne will show the works first, then Michael Reed in Sydney next May.

PR: Do you consider you work portraiture?

PH: My work has always been termed portraiture but in regards to the subjects I've photographed I never felt those works were about the subject's soul but the physical, elusive quality of the person, so I suppose they're portraits. All artists

whatever they make is actually a self-portrait when you think about it because you put something of yourself into it. All art is probably self-portraiture.

PR: What process do you us to create your photos?

PH: I've always stuck with the same process and use the same camera which is a medium format film camera. People often say my work is airbrushed, retouched, edited but I physically create the effect by using white or passive coloured background. The objects I put in front of the background are usually of a similar palette, and so it's a way of physically creating the effect by layering very subdued colours, upon colours. I also build a lot of space around the images and reduce noise and extract data and so the frame and photograph is usually very empty. I try to create quite singular looking images.

It appears to be this hyperreal digitally manipulative image but it's actually achieved through the placement of objects. If you put a white vase in front of a white background and you photograph it with soft light, it's going to have that hyperreal look to it. It's not necessarily something that's done digitally although some artists do. I like creating the images that look hyperreal, but knowing that they're shot on film and lit in a traditional way. Again, it's that polarity between analogue and digital. Unless you get up close to a print, you can't really tell. If you just see it on the computer screen it possibly just does look like a digital image. It's not until you look at the larger print that you might be able to see that it's not retouched that much and it's shot on film.

I think film has more of an emotional quality. I have done tests on digital, using a digital camera and have been very unsatisfied with them because I don't feel an emotional connection, when I look at the big print there's no emotional bridge, but when I shoot on film there's more of a nostalgic, tangible, emotional pull. Maybe it's just me. I'm not satisfied if I shoot on digital; I have to shoot on film otherwise I'm not happy with the work.

PH: With this new work I'm making, I may have spent a couple of months researching and building up ideas and working on image boards and storyboards. I'll just do a series of different photo shoots to see what's working

and then once the film is processed I do high resolution scans. I hire a scanner. Then the images are downloaded into Photoshop where they are cleaned up and anything that needs to be done further to the images is done there and then they're printed as prints.

If I can fix something up in front of a lens, then I will do it—a hair out of place, an animal or something that's just not right—I'll try to fix it there because I find whenever I've manipulated an image too much in Photoshop it loses its integrity, there's a line that's crossed. I've always tried to work within the discipline to create something by bringing the person, the wardrobe, the colour of the background, the objects, the animals, all in front of the lens. The actual taking of the picture is the last thing to happen. It's not that important but it's to report the sculpture. I try to get everything right in the sculpture first but working with animals and humans, and shooting on film can be quite complicated. Animals don't really listen.

PR: In saying that you are not really influenced by new media?

PH: No, not really. I've made two video works a while ago where I was interested in using the latest technology—a high speed video camera that can record up to 1000 frames a second, it ends up being slow motion footage, because I was interested in a durational photograph. The two video works I made were: one a tongue licking a flower and the other one is of a butterfly stuck to a girl's lips, they look very photographic but there's movement. I'm very much interested in making a work that's very photographic and it's shot on film, the classic, traditional approach. So I haven't felt the desire to make any more video works.

In the videos I was really trying to stretch out the photographic moment. And the tongue licking the flower, again, was looking at that push-pull effect between desire and repulsion. It could look like an advertisement to something but then it's incredibly repulsive as well. The colours are appealing, there's dew on the flowers and it should look desirable, but it's very repulsive. She's got a large tongue and excess saliva, so you are kind of embarrassed when you look at it as well. You feel uncomfortable.

PR: Some people think it's sexual or sensual.

PH: Yes, but it should be equally repulsive. Her tongue starts to look like a caterpillar because it's so big—we used glycerine which is this thick, clear, viscous liquid to make it look like too much saliva. The idea was to make it as equally repulsive as it was seductive. So you weren't sure which was you felt. Yes, maybe it's more sexual than repulsive.

Fantasy and illusion is a state or feeling I try to create in my images. Photography is a very literal medium but photographs are so loaded with meaning and ambiguity. I always try to shift my works into the illusionary, fantastical space between the boundaries of human and animal or I can look at different parts of female psyche or identity. If I was to take images that looked real or were grounded in reality it would be interpreted as something else.

APPENDIX FIVE

DANIEL PALMER

Associate Professor Daniel Palmer of Monash University in conversation with Penelope Royston on 30 August 2017.

PR: What is the meaning of contemporary portraiture to you? Are contemporary artists more influenced by new media than conventional forms of portraiture? Does this call into question mimesis (likeness) in a portrait?

DP: Historically portraiture has particular theoretical interest around likeness of the subject. Today that interest has extended beyond the traditional to collaboration and image sharing. This is indicative of the selfie and social media. There has been a tradition of painted self-portraits but lesser so photographs. People have tended to take photos of other people because of the difficulty of taking a photo of oneself. Selfies are a modern phenomenon, a means of taking photos of oneself and sharing them online. Everyone can take selfies with smart phones. Women are more prevalent on Instagram than men. Some believe selfies are a sign of narcissism, for others it's a form of connecting with people. Smart phones and social media is a democratic process of the global majority, we saw this in Egypt a couple of years ago with a political movement by the people played out in the main public square and on social media. (Look at the work of Nick Menzle?)

The phenomenon of the internet and social media has changed the way people communicate and represent themselves through photo sharing but they are at the mercy of the powerful corporations—Google, Facebook, and also Instagram. How and what data people share is valuable to these corporations in the age of computerisation. They mine information in elaborate and sophisticated ways—people's lives are a commodity to them—they can view images, gauge consumer choices to market new and more products, and exchange information. These machinations of power control social media and internet accounts. They share this information but it is largely invisible to us.

We have very little knowledge of how and what they are doing, and with whom. We get glimpses but we do not really know and they are unwilling to say, the process is not transparent. We try to intervene but the privacy rules make it difficult.

PR: How does this affect photographers and portrait artists?

DP: Social media sites, Instagram enables photographers, anyone really to upload images. Here everyone wants to be a celebrity, to mimic their lifestyles— there is nothing new about that. New technology provides filters for people to make themselves more attractive in their selfies and images on social media. We have artists as celebrities—Cindy Sherman has an Instagram account now. She digitally edits her work to make the faces more grotesque for her political statements about the representations of women by the media. Amalia Uhlman was one of the early Instagram artists in Britain. She presented herself as a tragic blonde, heavy make-up, face lifts, big breasts in portraits on Instagram, then she exposed herself as a hoax which became her signature digital work. It was shown at the Tate Modern about three years ago called 'Performing for the Camera'. Local artist Jackson Easton has done some work with selfies— I wrote about him in an article called 'The Mistake in Photography'— just google it.

PR: As an academic interested in photography your new book talks about collaboration, in particular relational portraiture as a collaborative form of social photography or the social encounter. How does this relate to the twenty-first century? Would you consider Nikki Toole and Ingvar Kenne modern relational photographers?

DP: Portraiture is not as simple as an artist painting a portrait or taking a photograph, artists today use various means to create portraits and share images, including social media. I am looking at twentieth century photography but images shared on social media is a form of relational portraiture. I am not aware of these photographers but looking at Kenne's images now online, his documentary photographs of the citizen would be regarded as relational photography.

PR: Are portrait and photography prizes still relevant today, such as the Archibald Prize, the National Photographic Portrait Prize?

DP: Are they relevant, unsure but they are certainly popular. They certainly generate a lot of media attention and have an eternal appeal with artists and the public. We identify with faces, there is drama in people's faces as they communicate something about themselves. The recent scandal about the Olive Cotton Photographic Portrait Prize demonstrates a new way of thinking about portraiture. A controversy has ensued about whether the representation of the artist's grandmother is a portrait. There is no traditional likeness of the person as an indexical image but scratches and a spit of saliva from the person. It's the antithesis of a traditional portrait, of what you see on social media. The judge was challenged by the media and had to justify why he chose this work over others. Google it. This year's Archibald Prize winner is known to us and we hope the portrait will come to the Monash Museum of Art. The Canberra Portrait Gallery photographic prize is open to anyone but the Gallery itself is more about the art of portraiture.

PR: Is portraiture becoming more ambiguous and fragmented in form, style and subject matter? Are any new or emerging artists, photographers doing interesting work in portraiture?

DP: Yes, with collaborations and the use of new media, although portraiture is not so prevalent in contemporary art. There are a few portrait artists doing some interesting work. Jackson Easton I mentioned. David Rosetzky is finding new ways of doing portraits and looking at the social encounter. His video of Cate Blanchett is a good example. Christian Thompson is looking a cultural identity in a different way using his own image as a political commentary. The avant-garde will always challenge and find new ways of presenting portraits.

APPENDIX SIX

PATRICIA PICCININI

Artist Patricia Piccinini in conversation with Penelope Royston on 24 August 2017, Melbourne.

PR: What motivates and inspires you as an artist? How would you locate your art within the context of contemporary portraiture?

PP: There are quite a few artists that are devoted to making work about themselves and their life but I don't have that approach but I do make work about the life we'd lead today and see myself as a kind of reflection and a response to what's going on around us. In that way, I would say it was a portrait in that it is something that I hope that generations in the future, if they look at my work, if it's still around, if it stands the test of time, they look at it and they might say, well, this community is interested in these ideas and they were grappling with these problems. In that way, I do think it's a portrait of our time but I wouldn't think that it was a portrait of me, not Patricia Piccinini and who I am as such.

PR: What about the *Embrace* is that not a self-portrait?

PP: Yeah, but the reason why it's not really me is because I wouldn't expect anyone to be interested in just me as an individual. Although that kind of confidence does help in the art world. I wouldn't impose that on anybody else, although I have a rich internal life but it's not what I make up artwork about me. I often do use my own body parts in the work, like in *Embrace* … and even recently I did a work called *Osculating Curve* … I'll bring it up on the screen. It also uses my body parts. It is a reflection of my concerns about life and reproduction, being a woman. I would say that I very strongly make work about what it is to be a woman artist and I wouldn't want to speak for anybody else.

PR: When you say you don't want to speak for anyone else, are you speaking on behalf of other women as well as yourself?

PP: Yeah, but I wouldn't want to speak for a man or even an Indigenous person because I think that there are wonderful Indigenous artists … it's their right to tell their stories but I feel that there aren't many stories out there that come from the point of view of being a woman. I think they're missing not just in the art world but they are missing in politics and they are missing in finance and they are missing in economics and they're missing everywhere, even in higher education. I think that what I say has got value, even just because of that, because it's kind of missing. That gives me confidence. It does come from me. All of this work really, really comes from me. In that way, you could say it was a portrait but it's not about my everyday reality. This is *The Osculating Curve*.

PR: Could explain this work?

PP: *The Osculating Curve* is actually a mathematical term. When two curves do this, say on a graph, they touch that means that they are osculating curves. They touch like that. That's actually a Latin term and it means kissing. To osculate is to kiss. This is a pregnant form and here is an arm and here is the progeny of this form, the offspring, and they are on top of her and of course she is a kind of mutant and a monster, an aberration. At the same time, what she embodies is a sense of fecundity and a kind of portrayal of fertility. She is pregnant.

It's interesting for me because so much is changing around reproduction now. For example, IVF, so IVF is a technology that's incredibly ubiquitous. It was only a dream even 30 years ago. My first child's an IVF child. I'm not critical of it. I'm not saying this is bad. I'm just saying that the way we understand reproduction is being mediated through new technologies. I am interested in what that means to us. For example, I would say in two decades, or perhaps even one decade, every birth will be mediated by *Chrispa* technology.

PR: What is *Chrispa* technology?

PP: *Chrispa* is a gene editing technology that has just been developed in the last five years. It's incredibly powerful. Already, foetuses have been brought to that stage beyond embryonic stage into a foetus form where their genetic material has been changed. For me, that's very exciting because I think, wow, that means that if you carry a terrible disease, like brittle bone or just cystic fibrosis or myriad of different diseases that are really devastating, you can edit that out and that means you can have a chance at being a family, in the same way that I had a chance of having a family through IVF.

That's a really extraordinary thing but at the same time we're thinking, well, what does that mean to us? We are living through a time that this sort of natural process is really changing in our eyes, our control over it. Also, not just the process, the woman's role in this process, but what it might mean for the offspring because once you change the genetic makeup, then it's not just for that individual. It's for all of the individuals that come after. There is a lot at stake and I don't think people are talking about it or really thinking about it.

PR: Your fascination with the human genome and genetic modification is evident in your work.

PP: All my work is like this. Every single piece is about what … how technology changes the way we understand our bodies and other animals and the environment. As you can see, in just a nice short conversation. This piece, even though my body is represented in here, this is my arm, this is a cast of my arm. This is my idea. It's not a portrait of me. It's not, "Oh, I've got it. This is my only child. This is my experience. This is my …" It's not a literal portrait of me.

In some ways, it is a portrait of what it is to be a woman, to live a life today. It's a very subtle distinction. It's not about my personal life, the John and Sunday Reid experience of life, who I am connected to, who I sleep with and all of that stuff. It's not that kind of a relationship to the work or to the ideas. The ideas are, I guess, ethical, philosophical and kind of conceptual. Also, the aesthetic of this is such that, yes, it is about all these ideas to do with the body and our understanding … it's also about the form itself.

I don't think people will arrive at this explanation that we are discussing right now very easily. They would be first of all … the surface layer would be their encounter of it. "Oh, that looks real. That hair looks like real hair and there's an arm with veins in it." So, there is that sort of spectacle level of it. Then there's the surreal level of it, like, 'Yeah, this is the surreal object. It has an element of the uncanny about it. Where on earth does it spring from? What does this really mean? What on earth is it? Is it a nightmarish thing or is it a utopian thing? What is it?" Literally, what is it? It's a surreal dreamlike thing. Well, if people are interested in it, they would maybe come to my website and read something about it and they would learn about the kind of conceptual or underpinnings of this work and what it's trying to discuss in the context of my practice and of that art gallery and of our time.

PR: Is there another particular work that you might want to talk about that is taking these ideas a step further, perhaps one in the studio? What is the meaning of the two legs?

PP: That work is called *The Pollinator* and what you saw is half of it. Did Peter take the cover off?

PR: Yes.

PP: Good, so what you saw was a kind of human form which is almost transformed … that's not quite the word … that sack in the middle is another pregnant form. There is a lot of pregnancy and fecundity in my work. In some ways I'm never going to leave that behind. That is something that, as a woman, I have a deep connection with obviously but I don't have to have a baby to have this connection to this idea of understanding the body as a site for production but the production of new life. I don't have to have a baby to feel that. I just have the body. That is the body that as a woman I live with.

I don't think a man can have that, not in the same way. They have sperm. They have seeds but it's not the same thing. I find that this concept is not only joyful and awe-inspiring but it's undervalued in our society. For me, to bring it out and express it over and over in different ways is a worthwhile thing to do and not in a

literal way. I don't want to just paint pregnant bellies. I don't want to do that. I could do that but I don't want to do that because it's too pedestrian, I suppose. It's too quotidian.

It's just … I want something that's not of this day but not of this life. I want something that brings us … that re-enchants this story, gives us a different slant on it. I think we are all quite familiar with the story of fecundity … actually, we're not all familiar. I think it's really missing. The story of birth and pregnancy and child rearing, that's a story that is very present in our lives and but actually, in some ways it's not as present as it perhaps used to be when we were more connected to each other.

PR: The nucleus family and living in smaller communities.

PP: Smaller communities, yeah, like, I think as a mother I was really disconnected … it was a big shock for me because I was so disconnected from knowing other families. This is a personal level. It was all new to me because I hadn't had other children in my life, which I think if you grow up in a smaller community they are in your life because you are just in proximity. Anyway, so I see my role as coming in and taking these narratives and re-enchanting them, so that when we go back to our everyday realities and understandings of them, we can take some of this meaning that comes from this story and kind of relate that to our everyday experience. I see that as my role. It's a cultural conversation that expands, that then might expand things to do with, I don't know, policy around how we treat children, how we fund childcare centres or how we treat our children, how we listen to them, things of that nature. Anyway, so this is the one.

Let me get back to *The Pollinator.* Sorry, I just got off on a tangent. *The Pollinator* is a work where you have this leg and this pregnant pouch which is almost like an orchid and we look at this form and we think, well, the boundaries between the body and this sort of species, the human species, and the kind of form of another species, the plant species, are kind of blurring and collapsing in our world. This is a manifestation of this idea. There are many manifestations of it in real life in science where we bring cells together of different organisms.

PR: For scientific research?

PP: Yes, for growing food, resilience to pests, so on. We do it all the time. That's life. That's the world we live in. Here we have a kind of creative … a spectacle oriented presentation of it and when the viewer comes up to it … and it's not something that's in a petri dish or in a food product that we eat that's being genetically modified. It's not something that you can almost not see. Here it is, this physical embodiment of this concept. How do I feel about it and what does it mean to me and also, it's a kind of recognition of this, of this idea that the boundaries are not as rigid for all of us?

They've never been rigid but for us humans they are becoming less so. That is in the body of works that this work is in. This work here is called *Teenage Metamorphosis* it's about a creature that is not only conflated with other species. This is a creature that's obviously a bit like an armadillo or something of that nature. Here, on its back… and I haven't got a picture of it, I'm sorry. Its back is like the sole of the shoe. Yeah, so if you look … when you see it from the back, and I haven't got a picture. Maybe this one. No, you can't even see it there but the back … maybe I can see another one which is in the same family. See *The Rookie?* This is another one that's in the same body of work. It's got a back that has got the sole of a soccer boot. Yeah, and now the idea that you could bring together different species but even … together with an object is actually a really, really, really big deal. This is not just a small thing that we can see the body in terms of bringing it together with an inanimate object, not just another species. We have always seen … I have been listening to things about Irish fairies … there have always been little people that have got animal spirits. We have always had that sense that we have had a connection with other species. We have had that but living in a world today we can have a connection with an object.

PR: I suppose initially the thing about this is where people have prosthesis and things like that, who have lost their legs or arms, either in car accidents or war. Technology provides people with artificial forms. You are taking that idea another step further by using everyday items, a boot, a soccer boot, and

connecting that to a creature and creating another form. How might this relate back to portraiture?

PP: That's right, so what I'm doing, as you are saying, is I'm looking around at what's happening in the world, could happen between humans and animals… because we are looking at bats and understanding that we can see the world through echolocation which is sound, screaming out sound and getting a picture back on your tongue from the sound vibrations that come back and looking at how we understand the body. To see like bats, we have to have a piece of technology in your mouth to be able to perceive our environment differently and think, wow, that's a really amazing and great thing.

I am kind of reflecting on possibilities, what I'm doing is I'm giving it a space for us to reflect on, both positively and negatively. I don't make value judgements in the work. I'm kind of honouring this moment and in that way, it's a portrait. I'm honouring this incredible time that we live in where we are destroying the environment but looking at other creatures and understanding their value and their intelligence and learning from them to make our life better, blind people seeing. We live in this incredible world of contradictions and I'm honouring the moment and saying we can see the body in this way but that would not have been possible 50 years ago and it's happening now. This is a manifestation of it and I'm putting it out there with you and it's a conversation we're having about culture that's changing around us and what does it mean to us. That's why I make these works, not because I want to be an artist. I make it because I'm widely interested in this world that we live in and I want to talk about it with other people. I make these sculptures as a catalyst for conversation. I expect people to get back to me and they do in their life, in the cooking they do, in the approach to animals, in the teaching they do, in their own artwork, in whatever they do in their own lives. Yeah, and they do. They get back to me, I may not literally see it but I imagine that this is just part of the cultural fabric, yeah, it's a kind of manifestation of this awareness of transformation as a culture, a change in culture. That's a big deal. Things are changing really quickly.

PR: Yes, people are talking more and more about artificial intelligence and its effects on our lives.

PP: It's also mythological. I have always been interested in myths because they allow us to connect to very difficult ideas. We can connect to them emotionally without being fearful or not being able to cope. That's what myths do. Myths, Greek myths, all kinds of myths, stories, they explain and make difficult things approachable for us and allow us to live with uncertainty, things that are not understandable, things that are not good, even, things that are difficult to relate to, things that are painful. It is painful to contemplate things like difference. It is painful for us because we are hardwired not to accept difference.

PR: Is it about fear, a fear of change in the present and not knowing the future?

PP: Yeah. I do get people thinking … dismissing my work because it's just too much, too strange. It doesn't really fit into a lot of established art modes. It just doesn't. I'm not Rothko or Malevich. I just don't fit into that mold of an artist that's interested in colour and form. I'm not that authoritarian kind and I don't want to be, either. I don't like that. I find it patronising, so I don't want to be like that. Often my work can be dismissed as just for children. That is also ironic for me because I feel that children are a very important audience, as they understand art differently. Anyway, there's an implied value judgement there. I get that but then on the other hand I do get people really, really connecting to my work. For example, last year, I had the opportunity to show in Brazil at one exhibition and, this exhibition, they thought they would get good attendances but in fact they got astounding attendances. So, they said, "We'll put it to another venue." This was in San Paolo. It went to Brazilica and then it went to Rio de Janeiro and then it went to ???? and over these four venues in one year it got 1.3 million visitors—for an artist who no one had ever heard of before. It's not like I'm Picasso. Really, it's not like I'm a known person. I'm not. No one knew this weird Australian artist. They'd just never heard of me or my work but when the work reached that country, people really connected with it in a very heartfelt way and people went. So, I do get that a lot.

I get a lot of young people connecting with the work. I gave the talk just on the weekend to some student teachers and one of them said to me … she must have been 22 or something. She said, "I saw your work when I was in high school in art texts and it blew my mind. Now, it's really great to hear you talk about it. It's blown my mind again." This is her language. I just thought, yeah, I can see why a young person would get something out of it. The interesting thing she said to me was, "Hearing you talk about it is really great because it blew my mind but I didn't really know what it was about."

So, for me, it was like, oh, it's very important to talk about what my work is about because often because understanding art is hard. You can look at this and it's got a superficial level and you can empathise with it. You can kind of … it's meant to be empathised with. This is the work that I try and make so that people can relate to it on an empathetic level and which means being able to imagine what it would be like to be this creature for a moment, for a day, so there's an empathetic level that people connect with. The conceptual level, you actually have to spend a bit more time with to arrive at. That takes a bit of work but my idea is if people empathise with it, then they are more likely to put the effort in to go deeper into the conversation with me about this cultural phenomenon.

PR: What is the process you go through to create your art works? What about the work with the long hair, the bird-like creature and the eggs?

PP: Well, I am really excited about that work. Liz the hair puncher is really important to me, as are everybody in the studio. All the work is collaborative. I come up with the ideas and people help me make up the work and I am very respectful of their contribution. At the beginning when Liz and I first started working together about 10 years ago she only did the heads. She is doing the head now of a little red baby, little baby that's going with the mother—you saw the baby and mother in the studio.

PR: Yes, I saw them.

PP: I would go into the studio and see her punching the heads and so she could start like this, do this and slowly build up the hair. The shape on the head of the

bald area would kind of change because every time I'd go in, as she would have done more and more. It was like seeing an animation of this moving form. It also struck me that I could draw with hair but I don't just have to make heads with Liz. I could say to Liz, "I want to give you this flat canvas. I'm going to put silicon on it that you can punch into, just like the baby's head that you are punching into now. I'm going to give you a drawing and we're going to sit here and we're going to choose the right colours and then we're going to talk about what it's going to look like. I'm going to tell you what it's about and I can just let you punch the hair in," which is great for her because she loves doing it and she's brilliant at it. She's got that temperament. She's very detail oriented, very detail oriented, very process oriented. That's how we work together. So, that is where that process came from, me thinking I can draw with hair. That's an innovation in itself. That isn't something that you can arrive at if you are an expert in hair punching because you are too close to it. Whereas I am not an expert in hair punching. I can move away from it and go I can take hair punching and do this with it because I'm not a purist, I'm not somebody interested in that level of detail which is vastly complicated and engrossing and a lot to master. I've done quite a few of works with baby and mother because I'm really interested in fecundity.

The one with the long hair and eggs is also about fecundity, well eggs are the traditional symbol of new life. Eggs are very important to me and I think to all women because we let one go every month. When I carried my daughter, I was also carrying my grandchildren because my daughter has got all the eggs in her body before she was born. I have carried my children, my grandchildren, already, but they have been inside of me. Eggs are really symbolic its but it's also physical connection between me and other people and that applies to all women.

Eggs are truly important signifiers and interestingly they have been used by religion, Easter. Well, not religion as such but chocolate Easter eggs. They have been used in not very helpful ways …chocolate Easter eggs are the bane of my life, literally. I hate Easter because I have to stop my kids from eating kilos of commercial chocolate and I hate it. So, this beautiful symbol has been squashed into this commercial goal of selling people cheap commercial food. That is something I really dislike.

Let me get back to this work, there are two ovaries. There's not literally ovaries but they are … they become ovaries, these forms, and here is the uterus. The uterus is a miraculous organ. It's incredible. As you know, it expands, it grows babies. It's an extraordinary organ but is sort of unknown and undervalued. This work is a meditation of these amazing internal mechanisms and forms. It's a kind of re-enchantment of reproduction and I feel qualified to make that work because I am a woman. It's part of me and no one can take that away from me. In fact, I would like to celebrate and share this beauty with other people, including men. I'm taking these symbols, these iconographic symbols, to deal with fecundity and reproduction, the bird that brings life. That's why there is an eagle there, an Australian wedge-tailed eagle. She is carrying … and she's carrying these two eggs but these eggs are strange eggs. They're helmet eggs. They are like heads but they're technological heads. We know that … we have this story in our Western culture that birds bring life and here she is bringing life and its technological life. It's something of great value but it's very, very strange in these works. It's a different kind of life. In fact, these eggs are so strange because they are helmets and they have hair growing on the outside. The hair is not on the inside. It's on the outside, so these helmets are … they are part of the head. They are not literal works. I think a lot people to grab onto in these hair punched works. Gee, every single hair is punched in, in the right angle with the right colour. Oh, here's an eagle. They're strange, they're beautiful, but they are very weird. What does this mean? These works are for the Adelaide Festival in February next year.

So in my work I want people to be left in awe and wonder but also try to see this beautiful awe-inspiring story of life in a different way. I have to say, it's super-feminine. I really, really don't think a man could come up with this image. I really think that. This comes from being a woman, it comes from me. This whole thing comes from me. It comes from me having a set of ovaries and that's not being essentialist about this or I don't want to be a goddess about it. I'm not a goddess. I'm not better than a man. It's not about a hierarchy. It's just about difference, being a woman, our view of the world.

PR: That's really good, it explains your philosophy and emotions behind your work, and helpful in how you think portraiture is a part of that, not of you as the individual person but as a woman portraying life as you envision it in the future.

PR: Is there anything else that you want to say about your work or your approach to tie it up?

PP: Well, recently I met Rosie Braidotti and she is a post-humanist. She's in her sixties, a feminist and a really fantastic woman. One of the things that I really connect with her, and her way of seeing the world, and this post-humanist way of understanding the world, is that we are not at a crisis.

PR: Are we not at cross-roads in our thinking?

PP: Yeah, there's a lot at stake. I think the biggest thing at stake is the environment. A lot of things have seemed to have failed us, things like the socialist experiment. In fact, communities like Australia and America are becoming more and more focused on the individual which is a kind of worrying development. Technology also plays a big role. The kind of inequality of life on our planet is not just between people which is a huge inequality but also between us, animals and other species.

One of the things Rosie talks about is that we're all in this together but we are not as one. What she means by that is to go forward, and there is a sense that we need to find a way to go forward so that we don't come to this crisis level, we need to go forward with other animals but we are not really doing that. I think environmentalists, critical theorists, they are talking around these things. The way they put it is in the past we understood the world through humanist eyes—what's best for us, but is that the way we still understand the world. When I look at the works that I make, and even very early on, it was often the work was about the rights and experiences of these individuals that are not just humans and that's always been an important part of my work.

If you look at the work *Eulogy* at the National Gallery, it's about the demise of the blob fish by man. I didn't make up the blob fish. I made up everything else but

not it … this creature is a really strange looking creature. How could I have imagined that, it's so intense. It's amazingly because its adapted to its environment. It's one of the few fish that stays with its offspring. It's a gelatinous creature, the density of its body is the same as its surrounding environment which is hundreds of metres below the surface and living with incredible pressure of water above it. It's being trawled to extinction because it's just not valued and so we are trawling for crabs that live there but we're throwing these guys out because we can't eat them. I've always been interested in other species and that's what this work is about. The human plays an important role here but it's really about kind of commemorating or honouring the passing of this creature. It's becoming extinct, so I think these things have struck a chord with me lately.

It's not gratifying but comforting to think that I'm part of the way some people are seeing the world and where my work comes from this sort of philosophical vanguard that in fact humans share the planet with a whole lot of really amazing creatures. The planet will keep on going and evolving and it will be there long after we're gone.

PR: We might stop our conversation there.

APPENDIX SEVEN

JUDE RAE

Artist Jude Rae in conversation with Penelope Royston on 11 September 2017.

PR: Your work largely explores illusions of reality in interior spaces and portraits of friends and notable people. In your painted interiors you draw on the aesthetics of the Dutch artist Vermeer in a weave of illusion and mindfulness—could you explain the meaning behind the idea of mindfulness in your domestic spaces and why you were influenced by Vermeer. Also your portraits of friends have their eyes closed—is this about denying the viewer access to the interiority of the subject's mind? You have painted portraits of some significant people—I would like to know how you approached these portrait commissions.

JR: The portraits of friends and colleagues with their eyes closed was first made in 2000 and again later in 2004.

For a very long time I have been interested in the ideas and the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist. What interests me about his writing is the challenge that he presents to Cartesian thinking which splits the world into subject and object. In a general sense it's a very useful idea because it's the basis of epistemological approaches to science but it is not adequate to the complexity of what or who we are because we are both subject and object, even to ourselves. The place that he locates that will reveal this complexity is the body. So I took that and said to myself—if the eyes are supposed to be the mirrors of the soul, what happens when you embark on a portrait that doesn't have the eyes open, the eyes are closed? But more particularly, I was interested in the idea that it would somehow lend a person as an object.

Of course, when you make a portrait there is a sense that the person sitting in front of you needs to be treated like an object, there's an objective in objectifying

a subject if you like. What I found and I sort of sensed already was that when you sit in a room with someone and they close their eyes, they don't become less of a subject but is more of an object. In fact their interior life expands, there's a complexity to how you relate to another subject. Which is what Merleau-Ponty sort of talks about in his main piece of writing that other people aren't objects to us because there's a sort of a complex relationality between people. Of course, this relates to portraiture between artist and sitter.

Getting back to the eyes closed thing, when I was sitting with my friends or my colleagues in my studio and I said close your eyes, what I wasn't expecting was this feeling of the trust that they put in me which immediately changed the balance. Overall, for me was this sense of trust and gratitude for that trust because to sit in the presence of someone else with your eyes closed is a very unsettling thing. I made about fifteen or sixteen of these portraits.

The National Portrait Gallery placed some of these little portraits in a room all by themselves, I can't remember how many but it was sort of presented as a meditation room. The effect was not the person as object but the powerful interiority of the mind of the person with their eyes closed with the viewer. People said things like 'oh it looks like they're listening to music or they're thinking' which is interesting. I guess it makes sense, if you're looking at a painting or an image of a person with their eyes closed, you impose on it what it might feel like to you and when one closes one's eyes, one goes within oneself.

Anyway, I already knew that the eyes are not the 'windows of the soul' because in terms of painting a portrait you really do not want to over describe them. You need to leave a certain amount of uncertainty around the softer features of the face, it's a subtle thing of course, or the sense of life of the person will be lost. If you try to be too exact with likeness you lose the potential for all manner of expression by trying to capture only one aspect of a person which I think is the difference between a painted portrait and a photograph. It comes back to what Rodin said about photography and sculpture … it's not art that lies, the photograph lies because it takes only a moment, whereas the artist sees many instants and puts together something more complex.

PR: So by not being too prescriptive about facial features, you can convey an impression of the person that is more interesting.

JR: Yes, lots of portraits are made from photographs these days. You've got to question why would you bother painting a portrait if you're sticking too closely to a photograph. But of course there are lots of smart painters who use more than one photograph and combined these with actual sittings which is what I do.

PR: Your interiors have a sense of stillness and mindfulness. Can you explain this and the meaning behind these works? Are they an extension of interiority of the mind in the portraits with their eyes closed?

JR: I was very conscious of, and interested in, how Vermeer used light to frame a state of mind, an interior state of mind. I suppose that's the relationship and the meaning. Vermeer's portraits of interiors with figures of reading is a state of interior digestion. So the interiors are a description of someone in a state of contemplation. The portrait of Mickey Allen is an example of this because she's looking out the window in a state of contemplation. By placing a figure in a space as I do, and as Vermeer does, the interior space mirror states of mind or even makes certain states of mind possible. Richard is sitting down in a room reading the paper and David is sitting in a room at a desk looking at his phone, they're both involved in an interior activity, a quiet state of mind.

PR: In your interiors, you have a mix of historic objects and contemporary objects, why?

JR: In two of them at least, Mickey Allan and David, I included an overhead projector with the lens looking back at you. It's a lens that reflects the artist eye if you like to the viewer which is a conscious reference to the convex mirror that reflects the artist's image in Van Eyck's painting of the marriage. The carpet also recalls an earlier time but in fact it's a new oriental carpet.

I'm also very interested in architecture. I think it has to do with mental states finding resonance in the spatial—there are spatial analogues to mental states. It's perhaps easier to have an expansive thought in a lofty space than it is in a box

that sort of thing. So this is why still life is very interesting to me because a bottle on a table is something very prosaic and extremely dismissible. In a way portraits are the same but more complicated, much, much more complicated—there is no such thing as a dull person, none whatsoever. It's whether or not you can create something interesting about the person in a portrait. I've done some really interesting portrait commissions since I did these interior paintings.

PR: How do you approach your portrait commissions?

JR: I always meet my portrait subjects before I agree to paint them and it's not to do with whether they're interesting or not, it's more about whether I can manage the circumstances and the expectations, whether there is something there I can paint, it's two sided of course. I wrote an article for the National Portrait Gallery magazine about portrait commissions called *Hired Guns Bounty Hunters and Horse Whisperers* in spring last year. It's on my website. The reason I wrote that piece about portrait commissions is that it's regarded as sort of compromised form of portraiture that has limits of style, scale and size limits. I try to squeeze something interesting or engaging out of those limits about the person. The first sitting is all about—moving around, the subject, taking lots of photographs, making lots of little drawings and just trying to get some sense of the person.

PR: You have painted commissioned portraits of Ian Chubb, the previous Vice Chancellor of the Australian National University, Frank Fenner and others.

JR: Yeah, I also recently painted a portrait of the past Speaker Anna Burke. It's the first painting I've done for the parliamentary collection. So that's really significant for me. It's also significant that Anna Burke approached me because she wanted her portrait to be painted by a woman. So it's the first painting of a woman by a woman in the parliamentary collection.

Later this year, or next year actually, I'm going to paint the Chief Justice of the High Court, Susan Keifel. She's the first female Chief Justice that Australia has had and it's the first painting by a woman in the High Court collection. I'm also going to paint a portrait of Linda Burney who's the first indigenous woman in the

House of Representatives and the first indigenous member of State Parliament. She wanted a female painter to paint her too!

So that's three. Each of these women were particularly interested in being painted by a female, and they chose me out of a range of portrait artists with different kinds of styles. I'm not known as a political painter but these are highly political portrait commissions. Commissions are always to some degree political because they are of a notable people.

I don't take many portrait commissions and I try not to make more than one or two a year. And so I was a little affronted to be approached as a portraitist because you know ever since I've won the Portrait Portia Geach, I come up as a portraitist, and it's not something I do a lot of. They're hard, they take up a great deal of time and take me away from other things but they continue to be fascinating, so I manage it. I guess what I'm saying is I don't like being pigeon holed as a portraitist, it bothers me. Why? it has a lot to do with competitions, it's competitive and I'm not particularly enamored of competition.

As an aside, the Archibald Prize is liberating for ordinary people, they feel that they can have an opinion. They can have an opinion about art because it's not about the art, it's about the portrait of a person and the whole relationship of portraiture to art or painting is complex and mediated by these sort of art prizes. What's wonderful actually this year's, there's a traditional Aboriginal painting in the Archibald, and the Wynne is top heavy with Aboriginal works.

PR: The unveiling of the Anna Burke's portrait is this week.

JR: Yes, it's this Thursday around 11 am.

PR: Is that a public unveiling—would I be able to come along?

JR: Yes, you would be welcome, I will email you an invitation.

PR: Thank you that would be great.

JR: I'm very much looking forward to it actually because what she wore for the portrait commission was quite unexpected for me and I am sure for others. At

first sight of the fabric pattern, I thought this is going to be too difficult but actually I think it's going to make the painting. The trick for the artist is to recognise that what a person wears can be a gift. She wore this extraordinary suit by Tiffany Treloar. She's a Melbourne designer that bases a lot of the fabric that she designs on photographs taken by her husband. The photograph for this amazing fabric was of the Castello in Madrid at night with fairly lights.

Painting official portraits of women is more involving because you've got to have a conversation with women about what they're going to wear which you don't really need to do with men, they just worry about the tie—its colour and pattern of the tie. Ian Chubb wore his Swans tie and that was great. "The tie was a perfect ct choice by Chubb because it lifted the colour of the painting". Anna Burke picked what she was going to wear exactly right too—not too conservative or outrageous—she was very smart.

PR: Some of the past Speakers are wearing traditional robes and standing, such as Anna's predecessor Peter Slipper.

JR: There are rules around Parliamentary portraits. The standard portrait commission is three by four roughly but getting bigger all the time. Peter Slipper's portrait is quite big with a heavy frame and very formal. Well that's important for him because we're taking about posterity here, he wants it to be serious to compensate for the scandals and issues around him when he was Speaker. This is an important issue for portraiture commissions which is about correcting public perceptions of the person.

Very few people want to be seen in their robes. Ian Chubb has his robes slung over his arm, Ian Young didn't want his robes either, neither did Glynn Davis and these are all Vice-Chancellors. Their role is more about business these days and not so much about academia at all.

PR: See you on Thursday at the unveiling.

APPENDIX EIGHT

DAVID ROSETZKY

Artist David Rosetzky in conversation with Penelope Royston on 14 September 2014.

Since the 1990s, David Rosetzky has been creating digital portraits that question the conventions of portraiture. His videos, photographs and installations feature both real life interactions between people and artifice. He uses media in both an interdisciplinary and collaborative way to explore social and personal relationships, selfhood and consumer culture about how people see themselves and how others see them.

Rosetzky spoke briefly about four of his works:

DR: *Weekender (2001)* signifies how consumer culture informs our identity and sense of self, as seen in glossy magazines, mass media, advertising, TV and the internet. The video with voice overs shows how young people today are having difficulty in communicating with others because of high expectations of the self and others created by the commodified global culture.

PR: Could this be said of social media today?

DR: Yes, there are parallels about how young people communicate and seek reassurance about their sense of self via social media today.

DR: *Justine (2000)* is about how young people have misplaced ideals of the self and others reinforced by our consumer society. In this work, I challenge the notion of the singular identity. Revealed through voiceovers, Justine expresses her anxiety about herself, her lifestyle and her relationships. She is not good at being alone and needs to constantly be around other people, her equally superficial friends, to feel good about herself. At one point the voice of the protagonist says something like 'I feel like I have to create my whole lifestyle, does my music match my mood, my décor, my hair'? What's

important here is that she adapts herself to the people around her which gives her a sense of self, superficial as that is, in turn it reinforces her disconnection from others.

DR: The video of *Cate Blanchett (2008)* was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in 2008. The challenge for me was to create a pluralist view of identity of the actor not the real person in a portrait. I had an image of a woman wearing many layers of clothing, different moves of the hands and the body that signifies different layers of identity. I was not trying to explore the person behind the mask but the mask of the actor. The mask, like a skin that can be discarded, embodies the many characters an actor can discard in performances but does not constitute the person in any way. Through movement we see the actor disentangle herself from her characters. Cate was not acting out different ways of thinking about herself, only as the actor. Cate had to learn the moves in one day which was filmed over six hours. Dance and choreography has become an important vehicle in my work to explore abstract modes of expression.

DR: *Half Brother (2013)* shows actors moving around a room, sorting stacks of paper that represents a peeling away of identity and the self which related to my own experience of going through his father's belongings. It is an investigation of life, a memory in an abstract way.

Artist David Rosetzky in conversation with Penelope Royston on 24 August 2017.

PR: Your work largely explores social and personal identity, the disconnect between social relationships and the sense of self, in a highly seductive artifice. As a photo-video artist, what or who was your inspiration?

DR: I am interested in the psychology of people and social cultures. I examine how people engage, respond emotionally and physically to everyday interactions with others in different situations, and construct social masks. Misplaced ideals and desires are in response to others expectations past and present in our consumer society. The Roman god Janus looked to both the past and the future, I look at how social structures and people's experiences of the past influence their behaviour in the present.

I create spaces where people communicate personal experiences or act out a range of emotions for video which I then edit into the final. I do work collaboratively with lots of talented and creative people—actors, dance choreographers, sound technicians and cinematographers—partly because I can learn from them about doing things differently, they challenge my way of thinking, and also I have a relatively small budget for the type of work I do. This has led me to some creative outcomes. In my early work, I used friends and peers as actors in my videos, photographs, photo–collages and sculptures but now I use professionals.

I was influenced by the work of British video artist Gillian Wearing, mainly her portraits and social masks that tell stories about identity. In some of her work she reverses the voices of adults and kids, and places actual masks over people's faces to create an alternate identity.

My early interest was painting, sculpture and installations. It wasn't until 1996 that I began incorporating video into my installations. Video has remained a strong focus of my work.

PR: You describe your work as portraiture, why?

DR: My works are portraits of people, society and culture. I question the idea of traditional portraiture by challenging the notion of the singular homogenous self.

PR: Can you talk about some of your earlier works and then expand on your more recent work?

DR: In my early work, I was concerned with how the global consumer culture informed our social identity, the way we responded and interacted with other people in everyday life, and represented our sense of self. The video works *Luke (1998)*, *Justine (2000)* and *Commune (2003)* are examples of this. I was interested in the superficiality of commodity culture—magazines, advertising, film and TV dramas that created a surface tension, a disconnect between the self and reality. My aim was to encourage the audience to consider their relationship with these images and how it influences and informs their lives. I used voiceover monologues, confessions of peoples' inner most thoughts about themselves and their emotional experiences with others. It highlights how people are imprisoned by their anxieties of their appearance, consumerism and the banality of their existence.

Luke (1998) is a single portrait study that was shot with a small video camera and viewed on a small television screen set on a white bench. I used Luke because he was a regular visitor to First Floor, the artist led initiative that I established with other artists around that time. I was intensely focused on my art practice, working with other artists in a creative space was really appealing to me. In the video, Luke is seen as a good looking guy with curly hair, a 'metrosexual' dressed casually in a grey jumper. He talks about his lifestyle choices and personal style but like other middle class males he has self-doubts about his personal appearance and style, and so becomes more conscious about how he looks and how he is perceived by others.

Justine (2000) also references the anxiety and insecurity people have about perceptions of themselves, their interactions with others and lifestyle. Her monologues are confessionals of intimate concerns about her appearance, décor, friends—is her boyfriend good enough? Her confessionals amplify her anxiety that reinforces her disconnection from herself because she is tied up in society's ideal of what she should be and how she should live.

Weekender (2001) follows a similar format of working but is more lighthearted and humorous. I interviewed real young people about their personal relationships and life

experiences which highlighted their difficulties in communicating despite their desire to connect with others in more intimate way. It reveals both the superficiality and complexity of human relationships. *Custom–made (2000)* is also about the desire for connectivity, togetherness, engagement and the difficulty people have with personal communications—real and imagined. I asked several people to talk about their personal and intimate experiences. The video shows people sitting in wood veneer alcoves giving personal anecdotes about their lives. It looks real but in fact it is not, I spliced together different peoples' stories, faded in and out images, to create the impression that it is true.

The video *Hothouse (2001)* shows people dressed in underwear seated being massaged by hands through holes in a box to music. The idea for the video was about exploitation for anonymous sex, the objectification of others which is problematic because people can be placed in compromised positions that may not appear uncomfortable on the surface but is personally. Here the people are in a state of denial about what is happening to them. I made a series of photographs from this to highlight that living together is (not) easy in 2002.

PR: You expanded the media your later works, why?

DR: *Untouchable (2003)* at ACCA was a three channel video installation was about isolation and the desire to connect with others. It was the first work that I used dance and choreography. I worked with Jo Lloyd as both choreography and performer. Dance was another way of expression, of connecting isolated characters in the performance. Since then dance has become an integral part of my creative work.

How to feel (2011) was another first with the use of professional actors and a cinematographer. It was more ambitious in terms of film production and acting over sixty minutes. The scenes were acted out and repeated by different people, the dialogue shifted and was repeated, to create a disconnect between people.

The *Portrait of Cate Blanchett (2008)* was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery. I provided four proposals of ideas and the Gallery chose one. Cate Blanchett was happy to be involved with whatever was decided. On a creative level I needed to reflect on how I would work with Cate to create a sense of self but separated from the

private self. I placed her in different acting roles or personas, with a series of voices overs and monologues to create a sense of identity but revealed nothing personal about her. The video opened with close–up gestures of Cate's hands moving, then her face comes into focus followed by a series of movements of performed roles over ten minutes. This commission created a lot of opportunities for me.

In 2011, CCP commissioned the video *Half Brother* that was in response to the death of my father and sorting through his personal things after he died. He was a graphic designer and artist and so had lots of printed material, artwork and papers. This is an homage to his memory and creativity. The video shows actors moving around the floor with stacks of paper—dividing, sorting, stacking that represented his creative process and me dealing with his papers. Memory, words on paper and actions are all intertwined when thinking about loss of another person. Jo Lloyd the choreographer and three male actors choreographed simple moves around the floor between them dealing with white paper.

ACME also commissioned *Gaps (date?),* a choreography of dance moves about cultural stereotypes of identity, race, gender and sexuality.

PR: What are you working on now?

DR: I am taking a break from making videos and working with still photography using the analogue medium, collage, black and white film, and experimenting with double exposures and overlaying images. I am putting together different elements of the body, clothing and other materials into composite portraits. I am working towards an exhibition at 10Q gallery in Melbourne. I am in the early stage of developing a new work called *Speech Patterns* that focuses on the deconstruction of speech, word associations, fabrications of language combined with movements of dance. I use people to convey how speech impacts on the sense of self and the engagement with others.

APPENDIX NINE

NIKKI TOOLE

Photo-artist Nikki Toole in conversation with Penelope Royston on 13 September 2014, followed with written comments provided by the artist.

PR: I am primarily interested in your views on observational and documentary photography—your photographs of the 'Roller Girls' and skateboards are of particular interest. Also you have been both a judge and finalist in the National Photographic Portrait Prize.

PR: First, tell me a little about yourself, what influenced you to become a photographer?

NT: During my teen and college years I had focused my studies on illustration and cinema. I had a drawing ability but an obsession with film-making. My parents were very knowledgeable about film and my father taught us how to draw and paint. I studies printmaking until I was 18 in Edinburgh, and moved to London to study for a BA (Hons) in photography, film and video at the University of Westminster in Harrow, England. I had every intention of becoming a cinematographer. While working on a solo film project I photographed a series of stills for a project called 'After The Silence' and discovered the darkrooms. I shot the images on a Sinar 4 x 5 camera using Polaroid type 55 film. This produced a black and white positive image and a negative that could be printed from it. I used the 10 x 8 glass plate enlarger to make what were then large prints of 20 x 6 inches. I had found a place where I could realise my ideas and vision in a way I hadn't considered before. I specialised in photography from that point.

PR: What motivates and inspires you and which photographer/s inspire you the most? What is important to you as an artist?

NT: One of my greatest pleasure is cinema, especially the work of Hitchcock, Wilder, Kubrick, Loach, Scorsese, Renoir, Lynch, Gus Van Sant … the list could go on. When I am working in colour I am also inspired by the technicolour of Douglas Sirk. His use of

muted colours to convey an emotion or to set a mood. The vibrant colour of Pedro Almodovar and David Lynch or the almost monochromatic colour of Hitchcock in *Vertigo* or *The Birds*. I am also drawn to cinema that investigates the complexities of psyche and alienation. The character of Billy Caspar in Kes by ken Loach, or Eraserhead by David Lynch. It is difficult to say which photographer I like most, as I tend to stumble upon them while looking at other things. Early photographers, such as August Sandler, Dorothea Lange, Lewis Hine, Weegee, early twentieth century mug shots and Walker Evans are enlightening. In terms of modern photography, post 1960 I would say Richard Avedon's *In the American West* and *The Family* series for Rolling Stone is beautiful and thought provoking. For visual splendor, Sally Mann, Alex Soth and Gregory Crewdson.

To explore my ideas over a period of time, and attempt to resolve them photographically.

PR: What is the meaning behind your body of work? Does your photography express or reveal something of yourself?

NT: My body of work is an exploration of the thoughts and experiences I have encountered during my photographic journey. There may be similar themes but they are loose. The main string holding my work together as I view it is "what am I thinking or feeling". My sitters are in some form or content imagining themselves in a state of mind or a role that relates personally to their own experience.

Each project has its own meaning and path of discovery. Whether my subjects recreate a moment of isolation, a state of mind while skating or the formality of readying themselves for battle (Roller Girls), they are a collaborator and I am the director and editor of the encounter.

A few years ago a friend who knew me well commented that my images were like looking at a portrait of me. I hadn't thought about this in much depth until that moment but I realised there was a large element of truth [in what they said]. I image the project before I shoot in such a personal realm that the editing of the final images only heightens this realisation.

PR: What is more important the subject/content of the photograph or the method/style? How would you describe your photographs?

NT: The method cannot always be controlled. While researching a subject for a project the realities of shooting, location and travel restrictions dictate the method and have an impact on the style. The idea and the realisation of that idea are paramount. An image that is stylistic without any depth or story is lovely to look at but does not hold my imagination for repeated viewings.

My photographs are a personal journey for me. I like to look below the surface of a sub-culture and explore how we feel about finding our place in society.

I am not sure if I have a preferred style, as every project demands its own style of shooting and printing. The 'Incline" project was visually inspired by the work of Caravaggio and the colour work of Hitchcock. The boys emerged into the daylight without any artificial lighting or manipulation. This project was shot using daylights an colour slide film. Daniel is on the edge of the darkness almost retreating. The project explored the way in which we exist in an uncomfortable way on the edges of our group at times lost in our own thoughts and feelings exposed, switched off from the activity of our peers around us.

The 'Roller Girls' were shot in small courtyard space with sharp daylight highlighting the bright colours of their 'battle ready selves'. Within this series there are some with almost monochromatic colour images (Lucky Day and Acheron Styx) and others with a dash of war [paint] blood red (Ladywood and Blitzkrieg Deluxe) that the inspiration moved between early tintype photography of young soldiers readying for war or the majestic military paintings of the 18th Century that hang in many Scottish castles.

PR: What is the process you go through to create your photographs? Do you work from life or digitally create and edit the portraits? Are you influenced by new media, the internet and social media?

NT: I work from life. I am old school in the sense that I prefer my work to have very little if any digital manipulation. Until recently I shot on film using a Pentax 6 x 7 camera with medium format film. I only moved across to digital when a swollen optic

nerve affected my ability to focus. The issue was resolved but I didn't want to risk losing images from a photoshoot in the future. I shoot very few frames of each subject, usually around five.

I feel that the style of my work is quite traditional in style but I do use social media as a way of connecting with possible subjects. I build a website for each project as it is in progress to inform new subjects and to let those who have already participated see their image and those of their fellow subjects. During the 'Skater' project, a Facebook page helped spread the word as we were travelling through Europe.

PR: What is the meaning of portrait to you? How do you view the face in a portrait?

NT: This is not something I give a lot of thought to outside of my own work. We tend to romanticise portraits of the past and I feel the same will happen with many of today's significant works. Personally I like to see a face that reveals something of the sitter, a thought process or turns itself into a mirror making me reflect on a past experience or a future one.

PR: What do you want the audience to take away from viewing your photographs? How do you feel about your latest (exhibition) works and the audience response? Among your portraits—do you have a favourite?

NT: If other young artists feel inspired to make work on their own sub-cultures this is always a positive impact. My audience may enjoy the pure pleasure of looking at an image they find visually satisfying or it may help them to see a sub-culture in a new light if they read the information that accompanies the project.

The audience response has been very positive. I am sure there have been negative responses too but I haven't really kept a close watch on either aspect of it. I always tell young photographers that it is important to make the work for yourself and if others like it then that is nice but it doesn't do anything for your drive to create more work. Other people's opinions should not be important to you, in the sense that they shouldn't dictate your path or sense of self-worth. If you are making work that makes you happy and you're trying to be thoughtful and kind along the way that is all that matters.

I have a favourite from each project but I do love the image of 'Tyson' from the 'Incline' project. We have it hanging in our hallway and I never tire of it. We know Tyson and it is nice to see a good friend there. Tyson was also my first portrait to hang in the National Portrait Gallery [National Photographic Portrait Prize] and this gives it a special professional significance for me.

PR: How do you locate your work within the context of contemporary art and portraiture? How do you feel about your rise to prominence as a photo-artist? What do you see in the future?

NT: This is very difficult for me to answer.

I am still surprised when people ask me to do a talk on my work or a magazine interview. I feel I would have a long way to go to be known as a contemporary photographer outside of my own circle of friends.

I will keep making photographic projects. I am working on a new one that can only be shot during the winter, so that will take time.

APPENDIX TEN

WAYNE TUNNICLIFFE

Senior curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in conversation with Penelope Royston on 11 September 2017.

PR: As curator of Australian Art how has your role changed over the past 20 years?

WT: There has been a noticeable change in how we work using the digital medium and communicate with visitors within the gallery and online. This has resulted in both a proliferation and fragmentation in viewing practice online, and easier access to information about exhibitions, artists and images. We have high traffic volumes on the website. Visitors search particular areas of the collection or an exhibition—present, past and upcoming. Young people today are more socially connected on social media and online which is a different type of viewing—a quick flick through information or exhibitions on the website. On the other hand, the AGNSW has a strong audience of the permanent collection both onsite and online. We have not seen a noticeable drop in attendance viewing the collection as a whole. The power of viewing an original work over a digital file online remains—I call this "the Mona Lisa effect".

There is huge competition in Sydney now between large cultural institutions and galleries, and free large scale outdoor events to secure viewing audiences. These free events are socially more engaging with the public, in particular young people, in both size of the event and numbers of attendance. It is very difficult for a fee paying exhibition within a gallery to compete with a large scale popular free event.

I get over a 100 emails a day so the volume of communication about the collection from a curatorial point of view has grown exponentially. I was the curator of contemporary Australian art, now I have responsibility for all Australian art, so my focus has broadened too.

PR: What is the AGNSW's approach to curating the collection of art works and temporary exhibitions?

WT: The AGNSW desires to engage on many levels with artists and visitors whether the approach is thematic, historical, cultural or experimental. We do combine historical and contemporary works to contextualise the themes of an exhibition or collection to make it more interesting and relevant to the visitor. We value art historical scholarship and original research on artists, art works and topics of wide interest. As you can see we still use paper models to design our exhibitions and galleries.

The AGNSW gets 55% of its revenue from large scale exhibitions, blockbusters as you call them, and 45% from State government funding. We do have sponsors of all our exhibitions. The summer period is the most popular and productive time for the gallery, that is in addition to viewing the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes.

PR: Speaking of those prizes, every year the Archibald Portrait Prize is pilloried by critics, artists and the public alike generating debate about the suitability of portrait subjects, art styles and the artistic merits of works of finalists. Has the popularity of art and portrait prizes with the art-going public and artists waned?

WT: The Archibald Prize remains Australia's most popular art prize, the public flocks to the AGNSW to see the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prize finalists each year in ever increasing numbers despite being able to be view the works online. The Archibald Prize is more front and centre of any art prize in Australia. Its legacy of portraiture and traditional painting goes hand in hand. The success of the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes has spurned lots of other art prizes across the country.

Adam Cullen's portrait of David Wenham in 2000 is regarded as a shift from the more traditional painting styles with its simple bold use of colour and brush work. It also brought in a younger audience and encouraged younger artists to submit works. If it was not for Cullen's winning work, we would not have our next generation of artists, like Ben Quilty with his spontaneous figurative portraits of family and friends. He has since gone on to be a war artist but his fresh contemporary style remains. This year's Archibald winner Mitch Cairns was influenced by the simplicity of the art styles of the early twentieth century avant-garde. Representation of the subject continues to play a

role, although its more than how people look, likeness or the face, it's about a sense of who the person is, and a sense of self.

Over the past seventeen years, there has been a big shift in subject matter, about who is being portrayed. We have seen more and more self-portraits, portraits of family and friends, and everyday people, lesser so celebrities and prominent people. The desire to take selfies and share images on social media is having an effect on how artists are approaching the Archibald—today its more about who is important in the artist's life or who they admire, and not the celebrity.

I expect the Archibald will continue to have a strong influence on portraiture in this country and audiences will continue to have an opinion on the merits of finalists and the winning portrait. It's a democratic process, we invite the public and art critics to express a view. Its general appeal will remain and so too, the painted portrait and that's a good thing when everything is going digital.

PR: What is the likely visitor and curatorial approach to the Sydney Modern?

WT: Too early to say, we are still formulating our ideas and approaches.

PR: Where to from here?

WT: Trends in contemporary art—I can't say.

Given our location in Sydney, we have a high proportion of International visitors and we need to mindful of that and have regard to how we present Australia to the world. Indigenous art and portraiture has a strong focus in the collection. We do not have a dedicated Indigenous gallery because we want to forge connections with other Australian works that are curatorial and culturally based. We do have curators who work specifically on Indigenous works, and we have an Indigenous advisory group. How we curate Indigenous works needs special consideration in response to our colonial history. We are working with the Tate on exhibition programs to promote Indigenous art and artists.

APPENDIX ELEVEN

ANNE ZAHALKA

Artist Anne Zahalka in conversation with Penelope Royston on 9 October 2017.

PR: I am particularly interested in how you explore cultural stereotypes and myths about our national identity, as well as appropriate past images, deconstruct and represent them with new meanings. Can you talk about the influences and inspirations for your work? What process do you use to create your photographs?

AZ: I guess exploring Australian identity and looking at the mythology and the stereotypes that have been produced has come really from how the early Australian impressionists carved out a sort of new landscape for Australia that differed to that of England. At the same time, the style painting had come from a knowledge of European painting tradition, so artists applied that to an Australian landscape. And within that, there were the figures of the heroic pioneers, bushmen and new settlers, and so on. I felt that those figures were important because they were from a particular time. They were very staged works and not based on observations of real life but at the same time there were great observations about how the landscape appeared to them.

So one of my early works (1985) I made was combining a kind of European romantic painting figure—Caspar David Friedrich's 'The Wanderer' overlooking the landscape I think by Conrad Martens of the Blue Mountains. I used that key image as a way to lead us into thinking about how the landscape was seen through a kind of European vision but at the same time trying to replace those figures and imagery that were in the original paintings with my own.

One of them is about my family called *The Immigrant* based on *The Pioneer* by Frederick McCubbin. I replaced McCubbin's figures with my own family telling

the story of their settlement here, the business that my father set up a panel beating shop—that's me in the pram there. And then there is the family grave with the name Zahalkova (Zahalka now) and rather than a view of Melbourne, you see a view of Sydney. It was made after my father died.

PR: In the original it's the man standing beside the grave because it's a woman who has died.

AZ: That's right.

These are my really earliest works from 1983 to about 1985. So that's the second version which is called *The Immigrants 2*. These were photos from family albums, I hand-coloured them and then I printed them, cut them out, pasted them down, it was in the old sort of way of working, photo montage, I retouched areas and then rephotographed them with 5 x 4 film and printed them again. That process is quite different from today. I work now often in Photoshop but being able to use the same kind of tools to recreate and image but digitally.

The other influences on this work was the cultural theories by Ross Gibson and Megan Morris who were talking about the influence of cinematography on the way we perceive the Australian landscape, the film Mad Max and the like. Ross' essay, I can't remember what it was called now, but it really informed my thinking about how and what the kind of images I was making.

I guess, in terms of other stereotypes, I look at the participation of women in society. In my 1985 adaptation of *The Breakaway* by Arthur Stretton, I just changed the figure from a male rider to a female by painting a plait on the figure in a reproduction and then re-photograph it. Also I looked at the way Indigenous people are objectified and co-modified through the eyes of a tourist.

Here is an Australian scene of a man 'Down on his Luck 'by McCubbin where I placed contemporary images of people barbecuing and playing ball as a kind of play between the stereotype of the Marlborough Man advertisement, and a scene of the encroaching city behind. The series of 'The Landscape Revisited' explored the imagery of celebrated Australian paintings and recreated them with less

romantic ideals of the bush. I recently showed these early works with a new series of works based on the same Australian paintings. The 2017 series shows: a man reading a newspaper in the landscape, an outlaw Ned Kelly but it's of a woman wearing a burkini sitting backwards on a horse holding what is thought to be a gun, and much more.

Also in an installation, like a kind of nineteenth century museum with vitrines that held objects, I referenced these original paintings with images on ceramic plates to show how these familiar images have been commercialised, co-modified and really embedded in our thinking and national identity.

There are other paintings that I often find myself returning to around Sydney, I think about how I might be able to create narratives about contemporary figures. I like to work with familiar images that people immediately know and then somehow twist them to get people to question what they're thinking and represent them with a new meaning. So I appropriate familiar images from the past and reconstruct them to tell another part of the story. I guess that's where the early work began.

I had a residency quite early on, in Berlin in 1986 so this work here was made around that time. The body of work is called *Resemblance* based on seventeenth century genre painting by old Dutch masters. I was interested in those paintings as a record of the past before photography which was done in a really descriptive way. They used objects, maps and texts and books to create a narrative. So I position people and objects in my images resembling the formal aesthetic conventions of these paintings to tell my own story. I did a second one called *Resemblance 2*, here is *The Cleaner*, *The Reader*, *The Cook*—The Cook was a poster boy for the Australian Photography of the 1980s which was a big exhibition in Canberra. Again, I'm doing it through this lens of the old Dutch Northern European painting but in Australian interiors. At the time, I was very cognisant of postmodern discourse and theory about appropriation.

They were the first kind of real portraits I'd ever done and I found that I was really comfortable with staging them in a kind of very artificial way. The idea of

looking at somebody and thinking about what other things inform us about them in the picture, the contrivance and artificiality of all that. But then there were these really lovely things about using element or devices like the drapes from the original paintings which is pulled across allowing the viewer to have a view—I liked that idea of including the view in that way.

And then, I always place something that was a bit out of sync, while it looks like a period painting or period photograph—everybody calls these paintings and I'm almost doing it—but then there's this modern element. In this work (?) she's got a Walkman which is pretty old fashioned now, a Sony Walkman, remember those? In this one it's not very visible, it's an electrical kettle which actually was steaming at the time but because it was white you don't really see that. I did a number of others, this one is loosely based on *The Ambassadors* which is by Holbein. This one is based on Vermeer's *The Art of Painting*. In the titles of later works, I felt it important to include who they were so I introduced brackets and then their name and their occupation.

PR: I am familiar with both Van Eyck's work *The Marriage* and your representation as *The Marriage of Convenience* can you explain the imagery in your photograph. What is he holding in his hand?

AZ: That's an umbrella, it's a sign of his Britishness. There are two passports on the table. In a larger work you see can them but it's pretty impossible here unless you're familiar with those passports to know that he's English and she's American. The marriage of convenience gives her the possibility of working in the E.U. So again, it's kind of reinforcing this idea of this set like space where everything is arranged and organised, and everything has a meaning. Here I am reflected in the mirror on the back wall with the word 'Vernunftehe' above it which is a German word that means marriage of convenience. My reflection is here with the studio-filled light and the window light. The little Rodin sculpture of the *The Thinker* is the idea of the artist practice as thoughtful and measured, and also balanced with the scales. The books are a reference to his practice but also as a sign of their possible deportation if she didn't marry him. So they were being expelled, like Adam and Eve, expelled not from the Garden of Eden but the

Zoologischer Garten which is the Berlin Zoo. And then there are keys, drapes and a rug. I like to play with symbols and I was just trying to develop a visual language. I didn't have that same knowledge or understanding of the original so I wanted to develop my own sets of symbols that the key could be a key to interpretation of the image. As in the original painting, the dog represents fidelity and faithfulness in mime too, this one is a German Shepherd that is a reference to the German location.

I photographed Graham and Jane again some years later in their apartment in a place in London which was quite a small space but has some of the same things *The Thinker*, books, here is my reflection again, also while he's standing, she's now sitting on the bed.

After the residency in Berlin, I returned to Australia and began to apply the same kind of compositions convention to real interiors and not working with artificial interiors. I still used symbols—drapes and other objects but instead of European symbols I used Australian visual references to see if the 'Europeanness' still shows through these images, even in contemporary Australian context which I think it does very much. In these interiors, I replaced the traditions figures with people from different backgrounds in the present. I was trying to play a game with traditions and conventions but within a contemporary context. That's what I love about photography because of its ability to just record all that information.

These are two self-portraits of me sitting at a table at home reflected in the mirror and surrounded by old postcards, a fruit bowl, again there are references to the Australian landscape with two Namatjira paintings reproductions on the wall behind me. And there's my collection of postcards which I portrayed myself as a collector in another series of works.

Here, I did this series called *Open House* (1995) about photographing people in their domestic interiors but this time presented in large light boxes transparencies to expose the private interiors of peoples' lives. I'd actually used the light boxes before for a very different series called *Fortress and Frontiers* which were of urban landscapes with figures staged in them. Here, I used a

modern day devices—objects, drapes and still life—in a similar way as artists of the seventeenth century did to contrive the spaces. I examine the relationships and living situations of the occupants through small rituals of daily life frozen in time. Drawn from the language of documentary photography and TV sitcoms, I parody these domestic situations with changing gender roles—he's at the sewing machine and she's watching TV with her feet up (Wednesday, 8.40 pm 1995); two men in suits eating breakfast (Monday, 8.05 am 1997). And this (?) was really a wonderful interior which I chose because of its black and white tiles but you look out to this quiet suburban scene behind. And the door acts as a drape slightly open to let you look inside. I titled them with the day of the week, the time they were made and then the date. It's trying to play on the idea of a documentary image that it records somebody at a particular time doing, everyday things in domestic situations, and so on.

At first in these interiors I wanted really dramatic moments of lust, anger and drama but the actors felt uncomfortable because it would be seen in public and could be misconstrued. And so, I became less interested in drama and more interested in the very non-moments as they're lost in their own thoughts. I ended up constructing a story or a narrative around what might be happening and how people are defined by their surroundings. I found that more interesting and I'm quite proud of that series.

PR: I would like to know more about the 'Bondi: Playground of the Pacific' series, and the later works.

AZ: I think they're probably pretty self-explanatory but they did come out of a residency from which I immersed myself in Bondi culture in 1988-89. I worked at the back of the Pavilion and decided to capture something of the history of Bondi in artificial scenes. Obviously, Charles Meere's painting was the impetus to question the very idea of this Anglo-centric kind of culture from the forties and how that had obviously changed. I paint a backdrop which enabled the viewer to immediately see this was a set-up. But at the same time I invited real people from Bondi—surfers, lifesavers, families, council workers to participate. It was the eighties and it still had beach inspectors! Less British and more

European with Italians, Greeks and also Japanese. I ended up just inviting different groups of people and trying to give a sense of the diversity of Bondi and the different communities that lived there. The backdrop was like an old 19th century photographic studio trope, I liked that play.

I revisited it in 2013 and called it *The New Bathers*. I did it in response to a request to participate in a documentary about Australian art called The Art of Australia by Edmund Capon. I didn't want to do the same, I wanted to reinterpret the image and update it. I worked with another backdrop that had been produced for an outdoor event down at Bondi where we had people coming and standing in front of it and being photographed as part of the festival. We then placed it back into the same pavilion space as before and invited new people to occupy that space—there is a woman wearing a burkini, a black burkini. I combined both Meere's painting and a painting of an artist who he worked closely with him called Freda Robertshaw. Hers is a much more sympathetic reading of people at the beach at the time than his is, I think.

Nancy Kilgour was also painting around the same time. This is part of a series of photographs of Manly taken in 2015, again lots of photographs of families, lifesavers, surfers, etc. They posed against a backdrop created from an original painting from the Manly Art Gallery collection by Nancy Kilgour c 1930s. She based her composite on the famous Georges Seurat painting *A Sunday on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. Here is my work *Untitled, Figures on Manly Beach (after Nancy Kilgour).* If you look at it, it has exactly the same figures but I reinterpreting her work by cutting out her figures and replaced them with some people from my other works. And actually what's nice is that she's from the original photograph of my first Bathers but she's not in the second New Bathers but that's her here in this one of Manly. And that's him there and he appears in both Bathers. Peter hasn't changed much, he's the main guy. And then this is my daughter and her boyfriend. This woman is in this one here and that's her child grown up a little bit. So it was really nice to step back from the past and look at these people again fifteen to twenty years on.

PR: Is there anything particular you wanted to say about the photos of employees at Parliament House?

AZ: My approach was just a look behind the scenes at Parliament House. In a way it was up to me to determine how I wanted to interpret it. and I thought we see so many images of politicians and public spaces in the assembly and so I decided to focus on the employees—it employs a massive number of people hidden behind incredibly interesting areas and spaces. I had a tour and looked through the building. I did some panoramas and then some individual shots. This is the Rock store, incredible its cut out of rock that sits within underground of the building. This is where they keep all their stuff.

PR: Your latest project is the Citizens of the World.

AZ: It's something that I've been working on for some time and it will form an exhibition at the Museum of Sydney in October next year. We did a callout across the country for photos and exhibition space. I have an assistant that works with me one day a week and she's been really good at putting together all the images that have come in, indexing and attaching all the information.

The project about using old street photos came about because of an image of my mother in Prague before she came to Australia, before she and my father fled communism. I just thought, isn't this amazing to see this image that captures her at a particular time in this city that she's has never returned to. It wasn't where she was from but where they moved to after the War. And here she is with a friend and they're looking so innocence, even though she's lost her mother during the war and she's a new bride. I like the way it captures a little bit of the architecture, people in the street and their body language.

Initially, I wanted to see if I could do the same using locations in Australia to capture people in the streets and see what it might say about who we are now. I'm not the kind of photographer to work in that way, so I hired people just as these past studios hired photographers to go out and take photos. In the past before people had cameras photographers worked in different locations around the city—there were 10,000 photos sold every week—so there's this absolutely

immense archive that's sitting in family albums and public collections all around the country and, as it turns out, all around the world. Lots of people who've migrated here have pictures of their parents from whatever country they've come from. I am building a series with some contemporary readings of them. I am looking at what they are holding, the fashions the shops and so on. I like the idea of how new migrants are depicted. Then there are the stories behind these photos—who these people, here is a man wearing riding boots, is he from the country and he came into the city that day? Of course there are famous people—here is Grace Cossington Smith. You can just organise people into all sorts of different categories. And there's quite identifiable locations—that's Customs House, you can see the Harbour Bridge. This was the old Taronga Zoo ferry.

PR: You said you want to have exhibitions in each of the States.

AZ: Yes, and work in some of the regional areas as well because they sent photographers out there. However, I am more interested now in archives.

PR: Why did you become a photographer? What influenced you?

AZ: I wanted to be an artist after reading a book by Kurt Schwitters on the Dadaists and thought they sounded so exciting and they lived these really interesting lives doing performance, poetry, collage and really engaged. I was just reading it for my High School Certificate. I wasn't really that gifted in drawing so I ended up doing painting. I almost enrolled in an arts degree but I was told it was too popular a course. I thought about deferring but then decided to put in a late application to study art, do an art certificate course and there I was introduced to photography and print making and a whole range of media. In the second year at East Sydney Tech I studied with people like Cressida Campbell. And then I applied to Sydney College and did an undergraduate degree and there was no turning back. I ended up majoring in photography and then later went back to the College of Fine Arts and did a Masters. There I was introduced to digital imaging and was hooked, I love manipulating images.